

INCREASE PERSONAL SPIRITUAL VITALITY BY  
LEARNING HOW TO MORE CLEARLY  
HEAR GOD'S VOICE

Lorraine E. Brown

BS, University of Delaware, 1989  
MDiv, Palmer Theological Seminary, 2011

Mentor

Frank Billman, DMin

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **INCREASE PERSONAL SPIRITUAL VITALITY BY LEARNING HOW TO MORE CLEARLY HEAR GOD’S VOICE**

by  
Lorraine E. Brown  
United Theological Seminary, 2020

Mentor

Frank Billman, DMin

As clergy in a mainline denomination, I have learned many Christians have not been taught how to clearly and regularly hear God’s voice in their lives. I hypothesize that if congregants learn how to better hear God’s voice, the reported spiritual aliveness and vitality of the people will increase. They will thereby be encouraged to step out in faith and be obedient to what they heard God say. Through a six-week class, along with practical exercises, participants were taught how to hear God’s voice daily, learn the ways God speaks, and to respond to what God is saying.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This doctoral project would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. First to my loving husband who has always been supportive in any adventure God has called me to regardless of the time or sacrifice involved. I am eternally grateful for his continually lifting me up, supporting me through struggles, and his proofreading skills during this process. I also want to express my sincere thanks to my mentor Dr. Frank Billman for his faithful leadership of our cohort group. He always gave invaluable guidance, resources, and feedback along the way. To my United faculty consultant Dr. Scott Kisker I give thanks for his insights, direction, and resource recommendations. To my fellow Doctor of Ministry cohort students, you were a joy to get to know, always provided needed encouragement, and were invested in the success of everyone in our group. I will miss our group times together. I have learned so much from all of you.

Finally, I want to thank my professional and context associates for their feedback along the way and the participants who attended the class, completed the necessary surveys, journal logs, and interviews to obtain the needed data to complete this project.

## **DEDICATION**

This doctoral project has been dedicated to God who called me to do it, to my family who supported and sacrificed with me through it, and to all those who faithfully encouraged and prayed for me on the journey to complete it. I am forever thankful and personally changed as a result of this journey.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

## **INTRODUCTION**

God speaks personally to his people every day. The question is are we listening? Can we hear God's voice above the rest of the noise in our lives? The problem that will be addressed in this study is the reality that too many Christians have a difficult time hearing and discerning God's will and voice in their lives. The purpose of this study is to teach people how to learn to hear God's voice for themselves on a regular basis. Learning to hear God's voice is something that needs to be taught, especially in the mainline denomination of which I am a part. Too many people do not know how to hear God's voice simply because they have not been taught the various ways God speaks and how to hear or recognize God's voice.

The purpose of this project is to teach people how to learn to hear God's voice regularly in their life. The anticipated outcome of teaching people to hear God's voice is that they will be encouraged to step out in faith and follow where God leads them and be obedient to what they are hearing God say. This will result in an increase of spiritual vitality in their personal relationship with God.

This exploration begins with my ministry context and personal journey and our need to learn to hear God's voice. Similar to how babies must first learn how to communicate with their parents through coos, words that are repeated over and over, tones of voices, facial expressions, songs, physical touch and so forth, we must learn how God communicates with us. Communication is two-way (both talking and listening).

Similarly, parents must also learn how their children communicate with them through crying, smiles, funny faces, noises, pointing, grunting, etc. Everyone is different. Parents also know the way they communicate with one child, does not necessarily work with another one. Just in the same way, how God communicates with each of his children will have similarities and differences.

The design of the project is undergirded by biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations. The biblical foundations covers two primary texts related to personal intimacy with God. The Old Testament passage explores Exodus 33:12-17 as it exemplifies how Moses communicates with the Lord as one does a friend (face to face) who engage conversationally with each other. The New Testament passage explores John 10:1-6 which beautifully portrays the intimacy of the shepherd to the sheep. The sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice. Conversely, they do not follow a stranger because they do not know his voice.

The historical foundations chapter explores three notable historical Christian saints in different time frames and how they heard God's voice in different ways. The three are Saint Perpetua, Saint Patrick, and Saint Francis of Assisi. The theological foundations will explore God's self-revealing love that desires, seeks to know, be in relationship with, and communicate with humanity regularly. The interdisciplinary foundations will explore what we can learn from the field of linguistics and learning with a focus on sensory perception which is crucial in learning how to communicate with someone.

The implementation of this project will be a six-session class over seven weeks. It will be offered to members of the congregation. The class provides teaching on the ways

God speaks, practical spiritual exercises designed to hear God's voice, personal sharing through testimony, study and devotional materials for the week, along with practical exercises to listen to God's voice and to get feedback from others during the week. The results of the project will be measured by surveys, hearing God journal logs, personal testimony, and post interviews to get feedback from participants on how God's voice was heard and most importantly how they responded and were impacted by what God said.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how my ministry interests and skills relate to the needs of Moore's Chapel United Methodist Church<sup>1</sup>. I have been the pastor of Moore's Chapel since July 1, 2017. I will explore how my God-given passion and heart to help people grow spiritually, from those who are exploring who Christ is, to the fully devoted follower of Jesus, and everyone in between is the fuel that compels me to help encourage spiritual growth in others. This passion of my heart is consistent with my mission and calling which comes directly from Ephesians 4:11-12 "...to equip his [God's] people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."<sup>2</sup> My vision as a pastor is ultimately to see people saved, healed, delivered, and set free so that we can be released for joyful obedience in Christ.

Moore's Chapel is an opportunity-rich environment for God to work, both in and through the local community and within the congregation itself. There are many strengths

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as Moore's Chapel in the rest of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:11b-12. The New International Version, NIV will be used unless otherwise stated.

of the church. A huge strength of Moore's Chapel is that when the church family rallies around a common kingdom goal, they press on to faithfully accomplish it. There have been several examples from the past when the church stepped out in faith and moved from the current way of doing things to a new way of doing things.

Some examples include going from a two-charge church to a one charge church, going from one service to two services, etc. Each time these decisions resulted in church growth. In both of these examples is when they see and embrace a clear kingdom vision, they run with it even in the midst of some adversity. They are resilient and can bounce back from hard times. There is a sense of family loyalty in the bond of Christ that helps keep people together.

Most of the issues I have heard about and a couple of issues I have personally witnessed in the church. One is the lack of healthy communication that seems to stem from unhealthy communications from people over the years. This has been lived by people either remaining silent and not saying what needs to be said in love. As a result, several people throughout the years have left wounded and upset due to delayed communications or those that came out sideways that were not spoken in love. In October 2017 we had some staff turnover in two key staff positions, after which the congregation became partially fractured and several families left as a result. The root of these issues may be traced to unhealthy communication styles, strong personalities, and not proactively knowing how to lovingly keep and hold one another accountable in Christian love. Another issue is the feeling of stagnation in the church. The cause of this could be many things including not hearing what God is saying and obeying where God is leading.

A third issue has been a heavy focus on fundraising events that have been keeping the church active and busy as they pay off the mortgage.

This analysis begins by reviewing the context and ministry needs of Moore's Chapel. This will be followed by a review of my ministry journey, interests, and skills. I will conclude by developing the synergy where the two converge into a ministry project. The conclusion of this analysis will be the development of a theme statement and hypothesis which will help to guide, develop, and build a Doctor of Ministry project.

### **Context**

To understand the needs of Moore's Chapel we must first understand its beginnings and history. Moore's Chapel is a blue-collar congregation that is theologically conservative. They have been doing ministry since June of 1872 in Elkton, which is part of Cecil County, Maryland. Moore's Chapel is part of the Wilmington District of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference that was established in 1965. The Peninsula-Delaware Conference includes the state of Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It is part of the Philadelphia Episcopal area and currently shares a Bishop with the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference.

Several significant events in the past forty years have shaped who we are today. In the 1980's the congregation knew it was time to expand the church. A vision to expand the building was underway. A revolutionary idea was proposed to pick up the building, move it back from the road, add a vestibule, and build a basement underneath it. The old church building was set back down on top of the new basement. The basement under the church provided an area for fellowship and a kitchen under the new vestibule which



included bathrooms for the first time in the church's history. The investment paid off spiritually. In the mid 1990's they added 6 new pews that accommodated the growth.<sup>3</sup>

The next growth in the church began to occur in 1999 when the church voted to move from a two-point charge to a one-point charge. The church doubled in size fairly quickly. The next growth spurt occurred a couple of years later when the church moved from offering one traditional style service to two services (a contemporary service at 8:30 am and the traditional service at 11am). These were positive changes that led growth.<sup>4</sup>

In 2003 a Building Committee was formed to consider the addition of a new building to better serve the Church and the community. Plans were finalized in November 2005 and groundbreaking occurred in the Spring of 2007. The Underwood Educational Building was completed in June 2008 which included a full-sized gym, Sunday school classrooms, and a full industrial kitchen. The vision for the future was cast at the consecration service. The hope was that this new building would not be large enough, that it would be used to the fullest and would be overflowing with people from the local community and beyond who wanted to develop a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. After the completion of the building a new primary focus and vision for the church was placed on fundraising to pay the building off.<sup>5</sup> The vision and rally efforts to pay the building off were a success; it was paid off ten years later in 2018. However, the vision of filling the new building to overflowing with people from the local community and beyond with a relationship with Jesus has not happened.

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<sup>3</sup> Moore's Chapel, *The History of Moore's Chapel Video*, <http://www.mooreschapel.org/church-history/>

<sup>4</sup> Survey feedback from select leaders at Moore's Chapel.

<sup>5</sup> *The History of Moore's Chapel*.

Geographically the church is located in the northwestern part of Elkton Maryland located in Cecil County Maryland (only a few miles from the Pennsylvania State line). The church is surrounded by a rural farming community and several housing developments within a few miles of the church. There are two buildings on the property. The main worship space is a traditional style sanctuary with pews, an altar rail, and choir loft. The sanctuary can fit eighty to ninety people comfortably and up to 200 people by adding additional seating and using every available space in the pews. Underneath the sanctuary is the basement that has a church library, a couple of offices/meeting rooms, and an open area that is used for meetings and other gatherings. The second building contains a full-sized gym, industrial kitchen, and several rooms that are used for nursery, Sunday school classes, and group meetings. This building is called the Underwood Educational Building and is detached from the church sanctuary by about thirty feet.

Demographically there are approximately 6,897 people living within a three-mile radius of the church and approximately 126,000 living within a ten-mile radius of the church. The table below contains respective breakdowns of population, ethnicity, average age, breakdown of house types with children, and average household income to give a comparison of the three-mile radius<sup>6</sup> and ten-mile radius data.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1. Demographics Surrounding Ministry Context

Description	Three Mile Radius of Moore's Chapel	Ten Mile Radius of Moore's Chapel
Population	6,897	126,000

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<sup>6</sup> United Methodist Communications, *The Executiveinsite 3 Mile Radius Report for Moore's Chapel*, United Methodist Communications, Adobe Digital Editions PDF.

<sup>7</sup> United Methodist Communications, *The Executiveinsite 10 Mile Radius Report for Moore's Chapel*, United Methodist Communications, Adobe Digital Editions PDF.

Ethnicity	92% White (NH) 4% Hispanic 2% Other 1% Black / African Amer. 1% Asian	82% White (NH) 7% Hispanic 6% Black / African Amer. 3% Asian 2% Other
Average Age	40.26	37.36
Households with Children	81.4% Married Couples 18.6% Single Parents	76.9% Married Couples / 23.1% Single Parents
Average Household Income	\$102,194	\$89,070

Demographically it is significant to note that the area surrounding the church is primarily white. This area used to be a stronghold for racial discrimination along with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) white supremacist group which is a primary factor in the unusually high percentage of White (NH) residents living in the area. In conversations with previous pastors at Moore's Chapel they admitted to me that they were invited to attend KKK meetings by congregants, which they declined. The racial makeup of Moore's Chapel is 99% white.

The present ministry and make up of Moore's chapel is a multi-generational blue-collar congregation. Moore's Chapel has two services on Sunday mornings, one contemporary (8:30am) and one traditional (11am). The mission statement that was recently updated (Jan 2019) for Moore's Chapel is: Winning Cecil County and beyond for Jesus Christ by changed lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Enabling Strategies include: Waking to the need of Jesus in all lives (Know). Walking in the Word of God (Grow). Witnessing for Jesus in thought, speech and action (Go).

The mission statement looks good on paper. The problem is not many people know what it is nor how to live it out. A vision team was recently commissioned in March 2019 to bring new life and clarity around mission, vision, and purpose. The

essence of the current mission statement will be the springboard to the vision team work. Creating a clear kingdom purpose and vision with some tangible next steps (strategic initiatives) will be instrumental in enabling spiritual growth and transformation in the congregation and the surrounding community for the next three to ten years. Doing this will be crucial for the future of the church.

I was appointed to Moore's Chapel in July 2017. At that time the congregation was very focused on fundraising efforts to pay off the mortgage. This had been one of their primary focus points for the past nine years. As a result, many of their "ministries" were fundraising events (annual golf tournament, yard sale, pancake breakfast (Tag Day), First Friday of the month dinners, etc.). The primary ministry of the church was Sunday morning services and fellowship opportunities at various times during the year. The main ministries of the church included hosting the Rotating Homeless Shelter for a week during the winter, Vacation Bible School in the summer, and hosting funeral meals.

### **Final Comments on Present Ministry**

I believe that we may have drifted off center over the years and away from God's vision for us. It is easy to drift off course and begin to rely more on our own power, knowledge, thoughts, and ideas and less on the leadings and promptings and power of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide the church into the future. We may have become so busy doing church that we have lost focus on how Jesus desires us to be the church in this time, season, and place. This is not at all to say we are missing the boat either as it is clear God has been and continues to work in our midst despite our being off-center. Jesus loves His church. As we move forward, we must ignite a hunger and thirst for more of

God within ourselves and the people God has given us to shepherd. We must seek God's will above our own and be willing to get out of the way. We must seek to hear God's voice above all the others speaking to us and faithfully follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit that birthed Moore's Chapel into being and will take us into the future.

I am reminded of a modern version of the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer that could help us remember whose we are and to passionately seek God's will and purposes above our own.

I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.<sup>8</sup>

### **Ministry Journey**

The first thing to know about my ministry journey is that I grew up unchurched. I was born in October 1965 and became a believer in April 2004. Many of the skills, interests, and passions I have developed have come from my experiences, education, and professional development. These are some of the building blocks that have helped prepare and equip me for ministry today.

My first real job after high school was at my dad's financial planning firm called Delmarva Limited. This job turned out to be a divine appointment unknown to me at the

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<sup>8</sup> John Wesley, *A Covenant with God*, The Methodist Church, Accessed December 6, 2016, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/a-covenant-with-god/>.

time for a couple of reasons. First, this job was full of practical learning. This job taught me how to interact with others professionally and it was here I learned some basics on how to run a business. During this job, I learned I loved to work with numbers. Every month I would look forward to doing the bookkeeping and took great joy in balancing the books to the penny. This was more about me wanting to understand things and see how things fit together. It was like putting a puzzle together made up of various pieces of data.

The second reason occurred one day at work. Dad sent me out to run an errand to pick up a pair of shoes that were being repaired in Newark, DE. This happened to be the same day that the students at the University of Delaware were moving in. I do not know exactly what it was about that day. Looking back now, I recognize it was God's convenient grace working in my life at the time. I just remember being so excited about seeing all the college students in town. In that moment, I knew in the core of my being, that I needed to attend. I was so excited by this experience, I picked up the shoes, set them on the top of my car, unlocked the door, got in, and drove off with the shoes still on top of the car.

When I returned to work, I happily proclaimed I was going to attend the University of Delaware. The realization of what happened to the shoes came into memory and I returned to look for them to no avail. This experience was the first time I had ever felt totally compelled in a good way to do something. It was not just that, but that I somehow knew inside me that the University of Delaware was where I needed to go to school and nothing was going to stop me. I applied and my application was rejected three times. After jumping through several hoops, I was accepted as a student. Four years later I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration with a minor in

Management Information Systems (MIS) from the University of Delaware. I graduated with a 3.02 overall GPA and a 3.5 in my major field of study (which was finance). In addition to my education, attending the University of Delaware taught me how to be disciplined and focused. This is a trait that continues to help me today in my relationship with God and in ministry.

My first job out of college utilized my MIS minor degree where I was hired as a Systems Analyst for the Children's Bureau of Delaware. There, I was responsible for designing a statistical information reporting system that would allow them to streamline manual processes. During this time, my communication skills were developed, as it was essential to get to know and build relationships with people in every department of the organization. These are all skills that are useful today in ministry. Frequently I receive feedback that I am very approachable and easy to talk to.

Five years later, in 1994, I was hired by Easter Seals as a Management Information Systems Manager and was responsible for their technology and reporting systems. It was here that I met and developed professionally under the mentoring and coaching of Leo Gilmore. Easter Seals sent me to a seminar on the topic of process reengineering. The speaker was Leo. I was very excited about the seminar and knew that Easter Seals needed to embark on reengineering. I felt compelled to introduce myself to him after the seminar and explained that we could benefit from this teaching. Unbeknownst to me, Leo was looking for a volunteer organization to work with. I introduced him to the president of Easter Seals at our Delaware location and he began working with me in a mentoring relationship.

The mentorship I received while at Easter Seals was invaluable. As a direct result of Leo's coaching, I began to increase in effectiveness and confidence. Under his guidance, I gained skills that were catalytic to my future success and gave me the confidence years later to walk away from a high paying job to pursue a calling to make a difference in the world. I was not a Christian yet. Leo believes in the saying, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Instead of Leo giving me the answers, he taught me by using action learning principles.

It is important to note that during my time at Easter Seals my personal life and first marriage were quickly falling apart. After the birth of my daughter in 1991, my husband at the time started to become verbally and physically abusive. After a last straw event in 1995, I left the marriage taking my two children with me and got into a twelve-week program for battered women that was totally amazing. In addition to that, I returned (more like ran back) to Alanon (I had attended for a year when I was nineteen). My step-mother recommend I attend because I had a history of dating guys who drank a lot.

At that time, I was a terrified, insecure, and fragile woman who had a long way to go. I remember sitting in a meeting and hearing a woman (she was a previous sponsor from years ago). She agreed to sponsor me again and today I would call her one of the most significant people in my life. She taught me how to pray and rely on God daily (I still did not know Jesus at this point, but I was certainly getting closer to God). With her help and guidance, I worked the steps and began listening and talking to God every day.

Working the 12 Steps of Alanon, especially the fourth and fifth steps, was crucial to my becoming who I am today. I remember thinking that as I made a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself that I had to be completely honest. I had to share



everything. I had gone too far down into the pit and I was too afraid to go backward. When it came time to do my fifth step (admitting to God, myself, and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs) I knew I needed to be thorough and not hold anything back. That even meant confessing that one thing I swore I was going to take to my grave. When it came time to do the fifth step I did it with her and with my psychologist. I wanted both perspectives from my sponsor and my psychologist. Confessing these things to two human beings was extremely freeing for my soul. When I was done, I had no more secrets. It was all out on the table. My sponsor loved me and my psychologist helped me process and understand myself. Having this experience has also made me a strong proponent of confessing our sins to both God and another human being. What I found is that doing this (with appropriate people) freed me in ways I could never imagine. The saying is true; confession is good for the soul. I began to like and even learn how to love myself; not only myself, but God. I vividly remember the day I told God I love Him for the first time. It was just natural and I truly felt it in my heart.

After leaving Easter Seals, the next company I worked for lasted a little over a year. This job taught me how to work with difficult people and in systems that have heavy bureaucracy. This was my first hostile work environment. Professionally, I successfully completed the project I was working on in an environment that was change-resistant. I had great relationships with those I worked with, both with people in my department and with many others who worked in other areas. The rub came with the higher-ups who operated in a politically charged system that I did not play well in. This job taught me to do the right thing for the right reasons even when it is hard. After I

completed the project my boss suggested I either get with their program or look for another job (I found another job).

My last job before ministry was in corporate America working for a credit card company. I excelled in this environment professionally and was rewarded for it by salary increases, bonuses, and paid vacation trips for a job well done. It was at this job that I realized I could do whatever I wanted. I could learn new things quickly, understand complex processes, and could find the places where current processes were broken which resulted in lost income. I loved this job!

Each of these employment opportunities were God-sent for different reasons. They all contributed to my professional development. Some of those reasons include simply being allowed to put my education into practice (action learning), learning to work as part of a team and developing a deep value for other people's input, learning how to be effective in an environment that is resistant to change, and giving me the confidence to later take a risk and walk away from financial success to pursue a calling to make a difference in the world.

In December 2002, while working in corporate America, after attending a leadership development weekend through Landmark Education that challenged me to reflect on my life's purpose, I got in touch with a deep-seated desire within me to make a difference in the world. I was confronted with an invitation and a choice; continue living the way I was (which was not bad) or follow this desire within to make a difference, not knowing where it would take me. The desire to make a difference was so strong within me that three months later, I resigned from my financially successful job to pursue a part-time nutrition business (Herbalife) that would enable me to be more available to my

family while pursuing what making a difference could look like. Ironically, Herbalife was the organization that introduced me to Landmark Education. Unknown to me at that time, the next year would be one of the harder years of my life as I struggled to discover who I was without my professional identity. Although this was tough, I knew I was headed in the right direction.

A year later, at the invitation of my stepmother, my husband Dave and I attended a United Methodist Church in February 2004 for the first time. Prior to this, we were perfectly content being unchurched. Six weeks later my mother gave me a copy of Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*.<sup>9</sup> I began reading it and seven days later in the quiet of my home, I said the prayer inviting Jesus into my life. I now had a peace in my heart that I had not experienced before and which I could not explain. From that moment, I knew I was changed. I was a new creation in Christ. I began reading through the Bible for the first time in my life, starting in Genesis. Six months later my husband, Dave, also invited Jesus into his life.

The God story behind the God story that we found out about later is that my Dad and step-mom were church shopping behind our backs. They visited many churches within a thirty-mile radius of our house. They believed they had one shot to pick the right church and they did (praise God). We went the first time with them out of obligation. They said they were so excited about this church they were attending they wanted us to see it. I still remember our first day. I noticed something was going on in there that was

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<sup>9</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2002.

not happening in my life and I wanted more of it. I realize now, it was the Holy Spirit wooing me and my husband ever closer.

The following year, May 2005, I attended a retreat called the “Walk to Emmaus” for the development of Christian leaders. During a break on that weekend, I opened the Bible to the place I had last stopped (I had started reading through the Bible that following July). It was the 21st chapter of John and I began reading aloud. When I got to verses 15-19, the words began to jump off the page and I cried as I read. It was like I was talking with Jesus personally. I’ll never forget it! Jesus asked me three times, “Do you love me?”...And each time I said, “Yes, you know that I do” ... He said, “Feed my lambs” ... “Take care of my sheep” ... and again “Feed my sheep” ... And then He said, “Follow me!” I then kept all this to myself.

Immediately after this experience I became more involved in the life of the church and began thinking about attending seminary. I would have thoughts all the time. When the thoughts came, I would usually dismiss them. We do not have the money, I do not have the time, etc. About nine months after my Emmaus experience while attending a Sunday morning worship, I felt compelled to pray on the steps after the service. It was like God started to talk to me saying, “I’ve put these thoughts in your head about attending seminary for the past nine months and you have yet to do anything about it.” At that moment, it was like my heart was convicted and I realized I was being disobedient by not following through. Immediately after getting up from the steps I went to my husband (crying) and declared that I needed to go to seminary.

Next, I scheduled time with my pastor to talk through what happened and began prayerfully following through. Five months later I began attending Palmer Theological

Seminary in September 2006. I was like a deer in the headlights. I had only been a Christian for a little over two years at this point. Seminary was an incredible experience for me in my formation as a Christian minister. Reflecting on my educational development I can see the God footprints that led me each step of the way to the schools I attended, jobs I had, and the people I met who have helped me along the journey.

In 2008 I became a local pastor and was hired as the Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Connection Community Church (a United Methodist congregation). My first task was to create and start small groups at our church. I was so passionate about the difference being in a small group could make as I had been in one since becoming a believer and continue to be in a group to this day. I am now in a clergy group with other women. At that time, we had eight groups. We launched a group assimilation model and in one night we went from having eight groups to fifteen and grew to have an average of twenty-five small groups prior to my leaving. One of the things I have loved is watching people grow spiritually. It is such a beautiful process to watch people change and transform into the people God intends us to become.

I was ordained as an elder in The United Methodist Church in June 2015. My eyes had been opening to more of God and the move of the Holy Spirit. I had been sensing and experiencing that the spiritual tide is quickly rising. In July 2015, my husband and I attended the Aldersgate Renewal Conference in Kentucky for the first time. God touched me in a powerful way there (breaking strongholds of fear, people-pleasing, and filling both my husband and me afresh with the Holy Spirit). This is where I first learned about United Theological Seminary. I met a couple of the professors and decided at the time I would audit a class in the spring of 2016 (which did not happen). The gifts of the Spirit

had been manifesting within us (my husband and I) and the team I had been supervising. We also attended the Living in the Supernatural conference that Aldersgate Renewal Ministries hosted in February 2016 which was led by Rob McCorkle. That is where I heard there was a Doctor of Ministry Program in Supernatural Ministry at United Theological Seminary. I had a little interest in entering the program and started the application process. It was not until the end of May after a worship and prayer service that I knew the Doctor of Ministry program was my next step.

In March of 2017, the district superintendent called me to let me know my name was in prayer for a new appointment. I was appointed at Moore's Chapel as the lead pastor and the first women pastor in 146 years at this church. The day before the district superintendent called me God had put Moore's Chapel on my heart. I prayed that is where God would send me. To my surprise, when the district superintendent called, he said we are going to appoint you to Moore's Chapel. All I could do was say yes and thank you, God!

My theology for ministry had been moving from a program-oriented model of ministry to more of an organic model that is driven and led more by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Not that this was not happening previously, it is just that my ears are more in tune with God's voice than when I first started. In looking back over my life experiences, education, professional development, and ministry, one thing that stands out for me is that God has been with me all along, wooing, and leading the way. The challenge for me and others is to better learn to recognize God's voice and to obey.

### **Develop the Synergy**

Moore's Chapel is dear to my heart. I have grown more as a pastor in the last two years than I have in a long time. As I look back on my life and ministry there are several divine encounters with God's grace that I am aware of. Each encounter with God's grace presented itself with an opportunity to respond. Each was an opportunity to move closer to God or not. Many times, I have chosen the harder path and have had to learn through experience. Experience can be a painful teacher. Over time I have discovered that two opposite forces are operating within the world, namely the spiritual forces good and evil. Most of the battle occurs in my mind. The challenge is to recognize and know which force is operating in our lives. As I grow closer to God it is getting easier to distinguish God's voice and leadings above all the other voices speaking in the world.

Earlier I mentioned, I believe that Moore's Chapel may have drifted off point and away from God's vision for us. We may have inadvertently forsaken our first love and taken our eyes off Jesus as the head of the church. It is so easy for personalities and old mindsets to take hold of us that we may begin to rely more on our power, thoughts, and ideas and less on the leadings, promptings, love, and power of the Holy Spirit.

We may have become so busy doing church that we have lost focus on how Jesus desires us to be the church in this time and place. Again, this is not at all to say we are missing the boat either, as it is clear God has been and continues to work in our midst despite our being off-center. As we move forward, we must seek God's will above our own and be willing to get out of the way. We must seek to hear God's voice above all the others speaking to us and faithfully follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

I can see how my passion to see people be saved, healed, and released for joyful obedience in Christ Jesus connects with the current and future needs of Moore's Chapel. I desire to help people grow and to help them fall more in love with Jesus. To do that we have to teach people how to more clearly hear God's voice in their lives and encourage them to step out in faith and be obedient to what God is calling them to do. We are a church that loves God and our heart is to do God's will. We just need to discern more clearly what that is.

The project I designed is to teach people to develop an intimate daily relationship with Jesus so that they can better learn how to discern and hear what God is speaking, and to encourage them to step out into faithful obedience. Learning how to better hear God could be the spark that awakens those who have fallen asleep and those who have become content. This could be the thing that ignites a passion within the body of Christ to faithfully live out our call to be the church of Jesus Christ in the surrounding area and to have a kingdom impact in our lives, families, neighborhoods, community, and world. This could also be what feeds the spiritual hunger of those who are not currently thriving in their personal faith.

What I hope to learn through this Doctor of Ministry project is to become a better hearer of God's voice as I teach others to do the same. Additionally, I would like to help people learn that we need each other to clearly hear and discern what God is telling us. There may be a way to link learning how to better hear and discern God's voice with the community. I am not sure what that could look like at this moment but am excited about the possibility of leveraging the spiritual receptivity of those who are not in the church to this project. God loves to speak to his people and through his people, those who are in the



church and those who are not. We must always remember that we need each other. This project teaches us how to better discern and hear God's voice in our own lives and creates an awareness of those around us to do the same.

### **Conclusion**

The theme I intend to examine in considering my passion and ministry skills and the needs of Moore's Chapel is learning to recognize and hear God's voice more clearly in our lives. This is crucial so that we can become spiritually alive and become aware of and step into the kingdom opportunities God is calling us to be a part of in this time and season. This project will encourage participants to be obedient and step out in faith to do what God is calling us to. The hypothesis and intention of this project is if members of the congregation are trained to better hear and discern God's voice the self-reported spiritual aliveness and vitality of the participants will increase. As a result, they will be encouraged to step out in faith and be obedient to what they are hearing God saying.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will seek to better understand the personal intimacy that is available between God and his people by looking at one pericope from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. Personal intimacy with God will be the main theme studied in the texts from the OT and NT sections.

The passages used for this Doctor of Ministry project were selected because they exemplify intimacy with God, that is, knowing God in a personal, tangible, and real way. They each highlight that God can know us and be known personally and intimately by us as one knows a close friend. Each passage provides a beautiful depiction of God's desire to communicate with, know and be known, and dwell among us both individually and communally. Both passages are connected by a common idea, that God knows his people by name.

The Old Testament passage selected comes from Exodus 33:12-17. This passage was selected because it nicely points out that the one thing that distinguishes and sets apart God's people from the rest of the world is the LORD's presence among them. This is also true in the New Testament. Moses stands between God and the people as he mediates the relationship between God and the people. Moses communicates with the LORD as one does with a friend (face to face). They share a two-way conversational

dialogue. They know one another by name. The LORD is real, personal, and active in Moses' and the people's lives.

The Old Testament text will consider the literary context. The literary context will include the backstory of the pericope (which is essential to understanding this text), the setting, the structure of the conversation, key words, phrases, and themes in relation to the book of Exodus. The intimacy and closeness that is depicted between God and the people will be demonstrated. A key theme is God's presence among the people. The main characters in this text are God, Moses, and the people indirectly. This will then be wrapped up into reasonable implications for the development of the Doctor of Ministry project.

The selection of the New Testament passage comes from John 10:1-6. This pericope came to mind while writing chapter one. The passage portrays a beautiful picture of the intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The sheep hear and listen to his voice. Listening to the shepherd's voice is more than only hearing what is said. Listening is an invitation to hear and respond to what is being heard. The shepherd knows each sheep individually and by name. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They know the shepherd's voice so well that they will never follow a stranger's voice because they do not recognize it. I personally do not know the shepherd in this intimate way. I know his voice but find that there are times I still recognize the stranger's voice and do not always run away. My heart's desire is to hear God's voice and to be able to distinguish God's voice among all the others speaking into my life.

One of the problems facing my context is that too many of us do not know how to recognize God's presence in our midst or how to hear Jesus' voice in our lives. If they

did, I suspect that I would be hearing more testimony about what God is doing in the lives of others. We have not been taught how to clearly hear his voice and we have not been taught how to distinguish God's voice from all the other voices speaking to us. I'm not sure how many in our context even want or know that they can have for themselves the closeness and intimacy these verses describe.

The New Testament study will consider the setting, the literary context, the structure of the passage, themes, and key words. A key theme in this passage is hearing Jesus' voice. The intimacy will be demonstrated in this parable by showing that the sheep hear, respond, and follow Jesus' voice for their lives. The main characters in this text are Jesus, the Pharisees, the disciples (indirectly), and others who are listening. This will be wrapped up with reasonable implications for the development of the Doctor of Ministry project.

### **Old Testament Exegesis**

The passage selected is from the Old Testament in Exodus 33:12-17:

Moses said to the LORD, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth." The LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 33:12-17, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this chapter only are from the NRSV. All other Scripture references are from New International Version.

One of the things that is evident in this passage is Moses' desire to know God more intimately. Moses wants to know and learn more about God's ways ("show me your ways, so that I may know you"). Moses has already had several supernatural encounters with the LORD and has seen marvelous signs and wonders. His desire is to know God even more deeply and intimately. I wonder also if Moses was taken back by the LORD's heart to not only free the people from Egypt but also to now dwell among them.

A key word or idea that will be explored during this exegesis will be the LORD's presence with Moses and the people. There are several themes in the book of Exodus. Thomas Dozeman, Professor of Old Testament at United Theological Seminary, breaks them down to two major ones: God's power (Ex 1:1 – 15:21) and God's presence (Ex 15:22 – 40:38).<sup>2</sup> The focus of this inquiry will be on the presence of God with Moses and the people.

As we consider the LORD's presence, we will answer some basic questions to help us to better understand what is going on in this text. Who are the main characters? What led up to this conversation between Moses and the LORD? What is at stake? Why is Moses so insistent that the LORD's presence goes not only with Moses but also with the people? What does it mean to know someone by name? Why does Moses have to remind the LORD that they are the LORD's people? What does "My Presence" will go with you mean and what does it mean that the LORD will give Moses rest? Why did the LORD find favor with Moses?

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus: The Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 680-683, Kindle.

*The Literary Context of Exodus 33:12-17*

The overall literary context of Exodus 33:12-17 is the narration of a conversation between God and Moses that seeks to answer the question if God's presence will go with Moses and the people or not. The Israelites were recently (only by a few months at that time) liberated from their bondage of slavery in Egypt. The geographical setting of Exodus 33 is found in chapter 19 which marks the first day of their third month after being delivered from slavery in Egypt (Ex 19:1). They are near the base of a mountain in the Desert of Sinai.

The main characters in this pericope are Moses, the people indirectly, and the LORD. Moses has reached a crisis point with the LORD and the people. This crisis was initiated by the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 while Moses was on the mountain with God where he recently spent forty days and forty nights in the LORD's presence on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:15-18). During these forty days on the mountain, the LORD told Moses to have the people make a sanctuary where God's presence would dwell among them (Ex 25:8-9). This is significant as it is the first time the LORD will dwell among the people since the Garden of Eden.

The importance of the sanctuary is that it will be the place that is set apart for God's presence to dwell among the people (Ex 25:8). The key point of this is that God's presence was to dwell among the people. James Swanson, states that the Hebrew word for dwell is שָׁכַן *šā·kǎn* which means to "dwell, live among, inhabit, abide, stay, remain, camp, i.e., to live or reside in a place, usually for a relatively long amount of time."<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew* (1997), s.v. "šā·kǎn," Logos eBook.

Hebrew word for among is תָּוֶּכֶּךָ tā·wěk which means “in the middle, midst, in the center, i.e., a space within an area, determined to be in the middle in relationship to other objects or positions around it.”<sup>4</sup> Prior to the golden calf incident, God intended to dwell among the people.

*The Back Story of the Pericope:*

To better understand what is happening, we must review the backstory, that led Moses to this crisis point. In Ex 24:12-18 we are told that Moses and Joshua went up to the mountain of God to receive the tablets of stone (the Law and commandments) from the LORD. Moses tells the elders of the people to wait for Moses and Joshua while they go to meet with God on the mountain. Moses puts Aaron and Hur in charge to settle any disputes during their absence. As Moses goes up on the mountain and the כְּבוֹד (kā·bō·wḏ), the glory of the LORD (the visible manifestation of God’s presence in the form of a cloud) settled שָׁכַן (šā·kăn) on the mountain. This is the same word mentioned on the previous page in Ex 25:8. Moses waits six days in God’s presence before the LORD speaks to him. On the seventh day, God calls Moses to come up into the glory cloud (into his presence) on the mountain.

Dozeman suggests this time of seven days “recalls the divine act of creation from Genesis 1. For six days the cloud hovers over the mountain until God calls Moses on the seventh day (24:16).”<sup>5</sup> Another reasonable possibility that came to mind while looking through the lens using the divine act of creation motif for the text is that the six days were

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<sup>4</sup> Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical*, s.v. “tā·wěk.”

<sup>5</sup> Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 8627.

work for Moses, to prepare his heart to enter God's manifest presence in the form of the cloud on the seventh day. God is now the one resting (hovering) for six days. Moses is working to prepare his heart, mind, soul, and spirit for when God calls him to come into God's rest (presence) on the seventh day.

I believe the six days prior to God speaking to Moses were essential for Moses' heart (by quieting down his mind) for the intimate encounter he was about to have in God's presence for the next forty days. Up to this point Moses had been in God's presence from brief moments to a few days. He did not know before this time that he would be spending forty days in God's rest/presence. He most likely needed some time to mentally process the recent events of God's deliverance of the people from Egypt and their first three months in the wilderness. These six days could have been crucial preparation time that gave Moses sufficient time to reflect, process, and settle down from all that previously happened so that Moses could enter God's rest on the seventh day. This was a time for Moses to be completely focused on God so that he would be able to hear all the LORD had to tell him over the next forty days. Think about it, what would have happened if Moses had become impatient as he waited before God's presence and left before God asked him to come into his presence?

Taking time waiting before God's presence is important to hearing God's voice more clearly as the waiting prepares us to hear. This time of waiting before the LORD reminded me of a two-day silent retreat I attended a few years ago. It took work for me to quiet down from the flow of constant thoughts in my head. I remember that on my second day of silence, while I was eating breakfast, tears streamed down my face as I became aware of God's presence in my midst. I wonder today what would have happened if I



stayed for the whole week instead of only two days. Meditating on this passage has created in me a longing to spend extended times in silence before the LORD so that I can enter God's rest and hear God's voice more clearly. As I think about how busy most of our lives are, taking regular time to be in God's presence is necessary and counter-cultural. It is essential and at the same time, it is one of the first things many people let go of.

While Moses is on the mountain those forty days, the LORD gives him specific instructions on how to build the sanctuary, where God's presence will dwell among the people (the ark and furnishings, the priestly garments, instructions regarding the consecration of the priests, the altar of incense, and instructions for the Sabbath, and more). After the LORD was done speaking to Moses on the mountain, God gave him the covenant law on stone tablets (Ex 25-31).

Just after receiving these instructions and the promise that God would dwell among the people, we discover in Exodus 32 that the people are out of control. They have turned from God while Moses was with God on the mountain. They wondered what had happened to Moses. The people asked Aaron to "Come, make us gods who will go before us (Ex 32:1)." They had become corrupt by making an idol in the form of a golden calf. The LORD is now more than concerned that he will destroy the people if he goes with them and as a precautionary measure tells Moses to leave and to take the people to the land the LORD promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 33:3-6). God promises to send an angel ahead of them to give them the land, but now communicates he will not go with them because they are "stiff-necked" and as a result, God is concerned that He will

“destroy them on the way” (Ex 33:5). Which brings us to the conversation with Moses and the LORD to the text at hand.

*The Setting of Exodus 33:12-17*

The setting or context for this conversation between Moses and the LORD is most likely the “Tent of Meeting” described in Exodus 33:7-11:

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. (Ex 33:7-11)

As Moses has this conversation with God, let us picture the scene in our minds. The tent of meeting is located outside the camp; the LORD is not dwelling within the camp or among the people yet. Moses goes into the tent to inquire of the LORD regarding this crisis. The pillar of cloud, that is, God’s visible presence to the people, descends to the entrance of the tent. As Moses is in the tent of meeting the people are most likely terrified as they stand and worship the LORD from afar at the entrance to their own tents. Three thousand people have recently been killed by the Levites (Ex 32:27-29); “And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made” (Ex 32:35).

*The Structure of the Conversation:*

In this pericope, Moses speaks twice and the LORD responds to Moses twice. Moses begins the conversation by reminding the LORD what he has asked Moses to do in the past. In Ex 33:12 Moses says to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people.’” Moses knows he needs the LORD’s help. Moses has no desire to go alone. He has previously felt the pain of doing things his own way. For example, when he killed the Egyptian who was beating one of his own people. Moses knows that his human efforts are in vain without the LORD accompanying the people.

Moses again reminds the LORD in Ex 33:12b what the LORD said to him previously “Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’” Moses says if this is true “show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight.” Moses makes it clear his desire is to learn God’s ways and to know the LORD more intimately. Moses desires to have a personal relationship with the LORD. He wants to know the LORD and to be known by Him. Moses not only wants that for himself, but also for the people, when he says this to the LORD in Ex 33:13: “Consider too that this nation is your people.” The LORD responds in Ex 33:14 by saying, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

After Moses gets clarification that the LORD will go with him, Moses next gets to the heart of the conversation with the LORD. Moses states in Ex 33:15-16:

If your Presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.

Moses is essentially saying if you do not go with us (I and the people) do not carry us up from here. God’s favor with Moses and the people is evidenced by his presence with

them. God's presence and favor are what will make the people distinct from everyone else. Swanson, states that the Hebrew word for distinct is פָּלָה (pā·lā(h)) which means to "be distinguished, i.e., pertaining to making a judgment based on a difference of quality or kind, implying an action will follow (Ex 33:16); deal differently, make a distinction, set apart."<sup>6</sup> God's presence and favor is what sets them apart from every people group. It is what makes them distinct.

The LORD responds to Moses by saying in Ex 33:17, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." The LORD confirms Moses' request because Moses has found favor in His sight and knows him by name. There is a connection between finding favor in God's sight and God knowing us by name. God extends favor to those who seek to know his ways and to know God personally.

### **Key Words, Phrases, and Themes:**

#### *Presence:*

One of the key questions that come out of this conversation with Moses and the LORD, is the importance of the LORD's presence accompanying Moses and the people. W. H. Bellinger, Jr. defines the Presence of God as "God's initiative in encountering people."<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word in Ex 33:14 for presence is פָּנָי (pā-nay) which means face.

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<sup>6</sup> Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical*, s.v. "pā·lā(h)."

<sup>7</sup> W. H. Bellinger, Jr., "Presence of God," *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, Trent C. Butler, and Bill Latta (Nashville, TN, Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1326, Logos eBook.

“My Presence [face] will go with you,” is found in verse 14 and it is repeated in verse 15, “If your Presence [face] does not go with us. In both instances, it is translated to mean presence.

In the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, pā-nay is defined by Swanson as “face, i.e., the front part of the head, including main organs for perception and speech; eyes, mouth, etc.”<sup>8</sup> One could conclude that God’s face or presence includes his eyes, mouth, and ears. In Moses’ initial encounter with God in Exodus 3 in the burning bush, the LORD uses language for all three (eyes, mouth, and ears) while speaking to Moses where the LORD said (the mouth): “I have indeed seen (the eyes) the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard (the ears) them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.” (Ex 3:7)

In this pericope, the visible manifestation of God’s presence [face] has been in the cloud at the entrance to the tent while Moses is conversing with the LORD as described earlier in the setting. The LORD’s face (eyes, mouth, and ears) are also evident in these verses. The LORD spoke to Moses (the mouth). The LORD heard Moses speaking to him (the ears). The seeing is implied, “Bring up this people.” Additionally, the LORD was the one who saw the people getting out of control while Moses was on the mountain.

#### *I Know You By Name:*

The phrase “*I know you by name*” is found in this pericope twice. The first time is in Ex 33:12 where Moses is speaking to the LORD. In this context, Moses begins the conversation and says to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but

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<sup>8</sup> Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical*, s.v. “pā-nay.”

you have not let me know whom you will send with me.” Moses reminds the LORD of words that he previously spoke to him. “You have said, ‘*I know you by name* and you have found favor with me.’” (Ex 33:12) The Hebrew word for “know” is יָדָע *yada* which means to know and the phrase, *I know*, יָדַעְתִּיךָ occurs two other times in the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

Eugene Carpenter, former professor of Old Testament at Bethel College, points out that this idiom means at least that “I have chosen you for a specific purpose” (cf. Jer 1:5; Am 3:2). Bezalel was called by name (בְּשֵׁם) to direct the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 31:2), and Yahweh filled him with all the gifts of wisdom he needed to do his task (31:3).<sup>10</sup> The second time it occurs is in Jer 1:5 (Before I formed you in the womb *I knew* you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations). The Contemporary English Version translates phrase “I know,” יָדַעְתִּיךָ, in Jer 1:5 as *I chose* you.<sup>11</sup> The meaning in Jeremiah is a knowing of him before he was even born. It was before birth that Jeremiah was known, set apart, and appointed in his role as a prophet by the LORD.

We can reasonably conclude that the LORD knew Moses before he was born as well, in light of Genesis 15 where the LORD makes a covenant with Abram, that Abram’s descendants will inherit the land:

Then the LORD said to him [Abram], “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as

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<sup>9</sup> Bible Hub: Search, Read, Study, the Bible in Many Languages, accessed September 4, 2017, [http://biblehub.com/hebrew/yedaticha\\_3045.htm](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/yedaticha_3045.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 2*, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 339, Logos eBook.

<sup>11</sup> Bible Hub: Search, Read, Study, the Bible in Many Languages, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://biblehub.com/jeremiah/1-5.htm>.

slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates...” (Gn 15:13-19)

In this passage, Moses would become the LORD’s chosen instrument to deliver the people from their enslavement in Egypt.

The next occurrence of the phrase “I know you by name” is found in Hosea 13:5 (*I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat*). This adds another nuance of not only being known but also of being cared and provided for. These examples provide a much richer expanse of the phrase “I know you by name.” Not only does the LORD know Moses, but the LORD knows, cares for, and provides for Moses and the people who have been set apart from birth. The next time this phrase occurs is in the last verse of the pericope Ex 33:17. This time the LORD is speaking to Moses and says, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and *I know you by name*.” (Ex 33:17b)

#### *Favor:*

The Hebrew word “favor” or “grace”<sup>12</sup> occurs five times in this pericope and means “acts which display one’s fondness or compassion for another (Gn 39:21)” and to “be pleased, be favorably disposed, formally, find grace in the eyes (Ex 33:13).”<sup>13</sup> There

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<sup>12</sup> Bible Hub: Search, Read, Study, the Bible in Many Languages, accessed September 4, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/text/exodus/33-12.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical*, s.v. “hên.”

appears to be a strong connection between God knowing someone by name and the LORD extending grace to those who are known.

### **Old Testament Implications for the Doctor of Ministry Project**

The main implication for this project is that God's desire has always been to abide in the midst of the people. Moses' relationship with the LORD was personal, real, and intimate. They knew each other by name and conversed together face to face like friends. Moses knew that the main thing that set the people apart from all the other people on the face of the earth was God's presence. The supernatural manifestations of God's presence among the people were witnessed by many (the cloud, fire, etc.). God transcends space and time.

The people had heard the stories of how God had acted on behalf of the people in the past. The LORD knows his people by name which means that the LORD also has a specific purpose that we have been created for. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We can celebrate that the LORD that created the heavens and everything in them is a God who can be known intimately. God's presence with us also brings God's favor.

Being in God's presence is more than just talking. Waiting before the LORD is one of the ways that we grow in our relationship with God. The LORD wants us to make time to be in his presence. Taking the initiative to make time is important to our knowing God and his ways.



## New Testament Exegesis

The New Testament passage is John 10:1-6 which reads as follows:

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

At the core of my selection for this passage and the verses that follow (Jn 10:7-21) is its description of Jesus as the Good Shepherd of the flock (followers of Christ). The Good Shepherd knows each sheep personally by name and the sheep know the Shepherd. An intimate relationship has developed between them. The sheep listen, that is, they hear his voice, follow, and obey his leading. The sheep’s relationship with the Shepherd is so close that they recognize when a stranger is speaking and will not listen to the stranger’s voice. In fact, they will run away from the stranger’s voice because they do not recognize it.

As a pastor since 2008, it has been my experience that too many Christians sadly do not know how to recognize the Shepherd’s voice speaking to them regularly. The church at large has failed to teach followers of Christ how to better hear God’s voice. This passage gives believers a clear vision of the intimacy that is possible with a personal relationship with Jesus. We can come to know his voice so distinctly that we hear it daily and can immediately distinguish, notice, and not listen to the stranger’s voice, the thief and bandit who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. (Jn 10:10)

In my previous church contexts, this is not something that was taught. My desire is to develop the intimacy for myself that this passage describes and to teach others to do

likewise. The focus of the exegesis of this passage will seek to discover clues to developing an intimate relationship with Jesus where we can hear his voice above all the others that seek to get our attention.

### **The Setting of John 10:1-6:**

The setting for this conversation is in Jerusalem. It occurs sometime after the Feast of Tabernacles and before the Feast of Dedication (Jn 10:22). In John chapter seven we are told that “Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach” (Jn 7:14). The festival this verse is referring to is the Feast of Tabernacles. Later in chapter seven, we read another clue: “On the last and greatest day of the festival Jesus stood up and said...” (Jn 7:37). After this mention of Jesus’ location, we are not told anywhere in the text that he left Jerusalem and later returned for the Feast of Dedication. The time between these two feasts is about three months. Although Jesus may have left and returned, it is unlikely, as John does a good job giving the reader the location of Jesus’ whereabouts throughout the book. In this passage, Jesus is speaking directly to the Pharisees. Other people are present as well, although they are not specifically named. We can reasonably state that the disciples and other Jews were present. John wrote about it with such detail that he recorded the moment for us.

### **The Literary Context**

Scholars disagree on the literary context of this pericope, namely is it a parable or an allegory. Commentator Raymond Brown, notes that,

The distinction between parable (a simple illustration or illustrative story having a single point) and allegory (an expanded series of metaphors where the various

details and persons involved all have a figurative meaning was used as the basis of critical parable exegesis by A. Julicher at the end of the last century.<sup>14</sup>

Brown, defends that Jn 10:1-5 are in fact two parables. He asserts that verses 1-3a make up the first parable and verses 3b-5 makes up the second.<sup>15</sup> Brown further states that Jn 10:6 is the reaction of Jesus' hearers who do not understand what Jesus was saying to them.<sup>16</sup>

For this chapter, I agree with Brown's conclusions. However, I am curious if this pericope is more than two parables. In my reading and meditating on this passage, I began to see multiple possible meanings of these "twin parables" as Brown referred to them.<sup>17</sup> Jesus states in Mt 13:52, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." I believe that there are new treasures to be found in this pericope. The new treasures will be the subject for another time as they will not significantly contribute to this Doctor of Ministry research and will therefore not be explored.

### **The Structure, Themes, and Key Words**

In this pericope Jesus uses and includes several common illustrations including sheepfold, sheep, shepherd, gate, gatekeeper, and the like. Jesus' audience would have

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (1-XII): A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 29 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 390.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Gospel of John*, 390-392.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Gospel of John*, 393.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *Gospel of John*, 393.

been very familiar with these terms. An important theme from this pericope that must not be overlooked is that of “hearing.” This is the key distinction between sheep that belong to Jesus and those that do not.

The first verse of this pericope begins with Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν; which means “verily, truly, amen, so let it be.”<sup>18</sup> In Marvin Vincent’s book on *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vincent says this phrase means, “Verily, verily (ἀμὴν, ἀμὴν).” The formula never begins anything new but connects what follows with what precedes. This discourse grows out of the assumption of the Pharisees to be the only authoritative guides of the people (9:24, 29). They have already been described as blind and sinful.”<sup>19</sup>

This passage points us to what comes before it, the story of the blind man in chapter 9, and what follows it in Jn 10:7-21 where Jesus explains the elements of the parable and gives additional details and meaning to those who hear. John 10:7 also begins with Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν and thereby is connected to what proceeds, the pericope. Vincent points out, the Pharisees before this pericope are described as blind and sinful. At the end of the pericope they are indirectly described as deaf, that is, as those who do not hear God’s voice which is evidenced by verse 7, “but they [the Pharisees] did not understand what he [Jesus] was telling them.” (Jn 10:6) They did not understand what Jesus said because the Pharisees did not recognize Jesus’ voice. They heard Jesus speak the words but did not comprehend.

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<sup>18</sup> Bible Hub: Search, Read, Study, the Bible in Many Languages, accessed September 19, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/greek/281.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 2 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 188, Logos eBook.

In the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, the Greek word ἀκούω that is translated as “hear” in the pericope, means “to believe something and to respond to it on the basis of having heard—‘to accept, to listen to, to listen and respond, to pay attention and respond, to heed.’”<sup>20</sup> Even though this word only appears one time in this pericope it is at the center of the meaning of the parable. Jesus’ sheep hear and know his voice. They respond to what he says. Hearing is more than physically hearing what is spoken. Hearing in this sense accepts, listens, responds, and heeds (follows).

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* stresses the relationship between God and man in hearing:

The use of ἀκούω and its derivatives in the NT reflects something of the significance of the Word as it is spoken and as it is to be heard in the reciprocal NT relationship between God and man. The hearing of man represents correspondence to the revelation of the Word, and in biblical religion it is thus the essential form in which this divine revelation is appropriated.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus is essentially equating the Pharisees with those who do not hear. He understands them to be thieves and bandits who have climbed into the sheepfold by some other way. They did not come through the gate; shepherds enter through the gate. They do not know God, Jesus had called them blind guides. They are not God’s sheep. If they knew God, they would have recognized Jesus’ voice [the Word] as their shepherd. They are sheep that do not belong to God’s flock and they are masquerading as God’s shepherds. This is similar to how Jesus said in Mt 7:15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

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<sup>20</sup> *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1996), s.v. “31.56 ἀκούω; ἀκοή, ἦς.”

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Kittel, “ἀκούω, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:216, Logos eBook.

In verse 2 of the pericope, Jesus says, “The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.” This verse describes that the proper way for a shepherd to enter the sheepfold is by the gate, and not by climbing in some other way like those described in verse 1. The shepherd is the only person who enters by the gate.

The Greek word for “gate” is *thyra* θύρα which means door<sup>22</sup> or “the entranceway into a building or structure—‘entrance, entranceway, portal.’”<sup>23</sup> Jesus is the entryway, the gate, whereby the sheep enter the fold. Jesus recognizes his sheep because they hear his voice (Jn 10:3). Those who do not recognize Jesus’ voice are not his sheep. Jesus states all who came before him were thieves and bandits.

Additional details of Jesus’ explanation of the gate are recorded in Jn 10:7-10 where Jesus says:

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

In these passages, Jesus says he is the gate two times. In the first reference, Jesus says he is the gate for the sheep. Jesus is the entryway into the sheepfold. The sheep must enter through him. Jesus’ sheep represent God’s people who have been born of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5). The next occurrence builds on the last, by adding that those who enter through the gate will be saved.

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<sup>22</sup> Bible Hub: Search, Read, Study, the Bible in Many Languages, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/text/john/10-1.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1996), s.v. “θύρα, ας.” accessed November 28, 2017.

We must look at these verses together as a whole to get the full meaning of what is meant by Jesus' proclamation that he is the gate. These verses provide more insight and understanding of what is being said. In the first instance, Jesus says all who have come before him are thieves and bandits because they did not enter through the gate. Those who came before Jesus, those who claimed to be shepherds (like the Pharisees who are called blind guides) but are not, entered the sheepfold by another means (not through the gate). The true sheep will not listen to them, because those sheep know Jesus' voice.

Commentator Raymond Brown states that there are two possible interpretations of the gate. "The first interpretation, found in vs. 8, sees Jesus as the gate whereby the shepherd approaches the sheep. [He states] This interpretation lies very close to the parable itself, for once again we hear of the thieves and bandits who avoid the gate."<sup>24</sup> After conducting additional research (below) I disagree with this first interpretation. Gates do not approach sheep. Instead, the gate is metaphorically referring to the gate of faith that sheep must pass through to enter the sheepfold. This is closer to Brown's second interpretation:

...of Jesus as the gate is found in vss. 9-10. Here he is the gate leading to salvation, a gate, not for the shepherd, but for the sheep. All must pass through the gate that is Jesus in order to be saved; he has come (10) to bring life to the sheep. This explanation has little to do with the parable 1-3a, and we may have here an adapted saying of Jesus from another context. If vs. 10 is looked on as an isolated saying, its pattern is very close to that of Mark ii 17. The idea in 10 resembles that in John xiv 6: "I am the way;...no one comes to the Father except through me" (see also Rev iii 7-8). The concept of gate of salvation is found in Ps cxviii 20: "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Brown, *Gospel of John*, 393.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, *Gospel of John*, 394.

I agree with Brown's interpretation that the gate is the gate of salvation that all must pass through to become Jesus' sheep. I disagree with Brown's comment that this second interpretation has little to do with the parable. My understanding is that it has everything to do with the parable as Jesus is stating that he is the gate to salvation. We must look at the parable with a wide lens. Jesus not too long ago declared that he was the Bread of Life (Jn 6:35) and the Light of the World (Jn 8:12). Jesus is using these terms as declarations regarding who he is. Jesus' sheep understand he is talking about salvation. Those who do not hear his voice are not Jesus' sheep. Jesus is the gate. In order for sheep to hear Jesus' voice, they must go through the gate of faith. This is why the gate is significant.

Earlier in John 6 Jesus says:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. (Jn 6:44-45, New International Version)

Jesus states that no one can come to him unless the Father draws them to Jesus. Everyone who has heard the Father's voice and learns from the Father will come to Jesus. The way I interpret this is that the Father is the one who draws people near to Jesus. This verse contains a promise that if we learn from God we will come to Jesus. The Father is the one who draws people toward himself. As we are drawn towards the gate (Jesus), we are able to enter the gate by faith, by believing the good news of Jesus. Once we gain entry to Jesus' sheepfold by faith, we are born again and are able to distinctively know and hear Jesus' voice. We have entered the sheepfold.

The Father's voice speaks to all creation so that no one is without excuse (Rom 1:18-20). Hearing the voice of God (the Father) is available to all through God's



prevenient grace. Those who learn from the Father are then drawn to and come to Jesus. Jesus' sheep are born by water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5-6) by faith. It is important to understand that hearing God's before we are born again is not the same as hearing Jesus' voice after we are born again. This distinction can be confusing to people. It was confusing to me. A lot of people who have heard God's voice are not Jesus' sheep. It is not until we hear Jesus call us by name that we receive a specific kingdom of God call for our lives.

In verse 3 we are told that "the gatekeeper opens the gate for him [the shepherd], and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." The gatekeeper only opens the gate for the shepherd, for Jesus. Once a person enters the sheepfold through the gate of faith, Jesus then calls each person by name and leads them out. This is the first time the sheep hear Jesus' voice. Jesus then leads the sheep out of the sheepfold.

In verse 4 Jesus brings out all of his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know him and they can hear his voice. They have passed through the gate. As stated above, the Greek word for "hear" is ἀκούω and although this word only appears one time in this pericope it is at the center of the meaning of the parable. Jesus' sheep hear him and therefore know his voice. Not only do they know his voice but they follow as Jn 10:27 states, "My sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me." Jesus' sheep respond to what he says. Hearing is more than physically hearing what is spoken. Hearing in this sense accepts, listens, responds, and heeds (follows). This is the key distinction and is an indication of the personal relationship with Jesus and each sheep who knows him.

The sheep will no longer follow the voice of strangers because they do not recognize the voice of strangers (verse 5). The Pharisees did not understand what Jesus said because they did not recognize Jesus' voice (verse 6). To illustrate this point, let's go back to the beginning of the pericope.

The beginning of this pericope began with the phrase Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν. As mentioned earlier this phrase indicates that the passage points us to what comes before it, the story of the blind man in chapter 9. In that story (the immediate context), the blind man encounters Jesus who makes mud with his saliva and puts it on the blind man's eyes. Jesus tells him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. Jesus only did and said what the Father told him. The blind man followed Jesus' instructions, went, washed, and came home seeing (Jn 9:1-7). I will assert that the blind man heard God's voice, but did not at that time know Jesus as Lord. John 9:24-33 illustrates this:

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (Jn 9:24-33)

The man who was blind heard Jesus' voice and followed his instructions, but he did not yet know Jesus personally. This is indicated when he said, "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will." The man

only knows that Jesus comes from God. He does not yet belong to Jesus as one of his sheep. This does not occur until the next conversation where Jesus asks him in verse 35:

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. (Jn 9:35b-38)

The man entered through the gate when he said, “Lord, I believe.” We know this because he worshiped him. Jesus in the parable demonstrates what he has been saying in a very elementary way.

The theme of hearing is also related to what comes before the story of the blind man. We get the literary hint from Jn 8:58-59 where Jesus states: “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. These words immediately follow the story of the blind man. Chapter breaks in the Bible are man-made and therefore they do not always follow clean breaks between stories. If we go back to Jn 8:42-47, Jesus tells those listening:

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” (Jn 8:42-47)

Those who are listening do not hear because they do not belong to God. The key distinction that they do not belong to God is their inability to hear what Jesus is saying. They are instead listening to their father, the devil (Jn 8:44). Jesus uses plain language

without using parables or allegories. When we get to John 10, Jesus uses the familiar illustration of shepherding sheep to give them the opportunity to hear using a parable with metaphors they know. They still do not understand.

Hearing and responding to God's voice is a theme in the book of John beginning in chapter one. This is directly related to intimacy and knowing God. We first hear the God's voice that draws us toward the gate of faith which is Jesus. Romans 10:16-18 tells us:

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (Rom 10:16-18)

Throughout the book of John, the word for hear ἀκούω occurs fifty-nine times. Forty-five of those occur in the first eleven chapters.

### **Implications for the Doctor of Ministry Project**

The main implication for the Doctor of Ministry Project is a deeper understanding of the distinction between the general voice of God and the specific voice of Jesus through a personal relationship with him. This understanding is huge for me. I have always struggled with this. I knew God's general voice before receiving Jesus as my Lord and Savior. After doing this research I better understand the difference between the general voice of God that speaks to all people and the specific voice of Jesus in my life as one of his sheep.

For me, I heard God's voice previously, I knew someone outside of myself was speaking to me. I just did not know it was God at the time. I thought it was my intuition.

God's voice was more general at that time. Even though I heard specific things, they did not connect with doing the work of building the kingdom of God here on earth. After I invited Jesus into my heart, I began to hear and receive specific direction from Jesus leading me in his kingdom purposes for me life. When we know Jesus and hear his voice, we get specific instructions regarding the kingdom of God in our context and time.

There was a blurry line for me between knowing God and knowing Jesus. Sometimes I wondered if I knew Jesus before inviting him into my heart. This now makes sense to me, as I did know God, I knew God as the Father who drew me towards Jesus. The relationship with Jesus is so much more personal and intimate. Jesus really is like a friend. Doing this research has reaffirmed that I do hear Jesus' voice. It is like my ears opened during the research and writing of this chapter. I am thankful for that. As a result, I believe I will be able to help others recognize the difference between God's voice and Jesus' personal voice as our shepherd king.

### **Summary**

The study of these two passages is foundational for the anticipated DMin project work in that they provide the biblical foundations the project will be based on. The main theme is God's desire to be in relationship with humanity. God desires to know and be known personally by people both individually and communally. In order to have an intimate personal relationship with another, we need to spend time with them getting to know them. Both passages set the biblical foundation and give examples of this personal relationship. Not only does God wish to know and be known, but God also desires to dwell among us. This is not a long-distance relationship.

In the OT passage, God's dwelling in the midst of the people was the main subject of the conversation between God and Moses. When we looked at the back story, we saw how waiting or being in God's presence without God speaking to us is one of the ways we get to know God. When we sit in God's presence, we can begin to experience God's goodness and favor with us now. Words do not have to be spoken to sense and know God. Moses also had a designated place called the "Tent of Meeting" where God would meet with him. Moses would enter the tent and the visible manifestation of God's presence would join him at the front of the tent for all to see. Expressing our desire to know God and God's ways is another way the relationship develops. Developing a personal relationship with someone takes effort on the part of two or more parties.

God's presence (face) includes God's ability to see, hear, and speak. Being in God's presence automatically brings God's favor and blessing because the heart of God is love. God initially approached Moses because the LORD had compassion for the people and wanted to free them from their slavery. God's presence with us is what makes us distinct. God knows his people by name and has created us for a specific purpose. Knowing God gives meaning and a kingdom of God purpose to our lives. It is a close relationship and partnership.

For the NT passage, in this parable Jesus is using the imagery of God as a loving shepherd who loves, cares for, and provides for the sheep. Jesus knows each sheep (person) by name who has come through the gate of faith (those who confess and believe who Jesus is). The main catalyst to a personal relationship with Jesus is faith. God the Father speaks to all people in a general way, but it is not until we invite Jesus into our hearts that we begin to personally know Jesus' specific voice for our lives.

Having a personal relationship with Jesus is the key that unlocks and opens the door to our kingdom purpose when God first thought of us before we were born.

Everyone who invites Jesus into their life can hear his voice. The point is we need to be taught to distinguish Jesus' voice from all the others. It means teaching people the distinction between the general and specific voice of God in our lives. This is foundational to the project.

The key to developing this relationship with Jesus is learning how to listen and follow. Hearing Jesus' voice means more than just hearing. It means we put what we are learning into practice and we follow and do what we are being told. It means teaching people that they really do hear Jesus' voice and that they can distinguish and run from the stranger's voice. It is about teaching others and helping them to understand that the stranger's voice (satan or the devil) wants us to doubt and not believe that we can hear Jesus' voice. I think this could be the main deception of the enemy.

These are the initial biblical foundations that will be used in the development of this project. I am confident that these passages will come to life in new ways as the project develops. It will also be important that the individual and community nature of these texts remain at the center of the project. We are not lone rangers or lone sheep. All of Jesus' sheep are part of the same flock. We must not lose sight of the community of believers. We are meant to be part of the fold (all believers). We need each other. Just as we are meant to have a personal relationship with Jesus, we are also meant to be in relationship with one another. What makes us distinct as a people is that God's presence resides and dwells within us and that we hear God's voice and respond to what God says and shows us.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will look at and explore three notable historical Christian saints over time and note the different ways they heard God speaking to them as a reflection of the intimacy and closeness of their relationship with Jesus. These three people are Saint Perpetua (181 – 203 AD), Saint Patrick (385 – 461 AD), and Saint Francis of Assisi (1183 – 1226 AD) each of whom lived during different timeframes and faced differing life circumstances.

Even though this research is looking at three different historical figures, the focus of this research will be on how they heard God speaking to them, therefore other significant events in their lives will not be mentioned. Additionally, due to their historic nature, the quantity and various lenses through which their lives could be viewed, the focus will be to note and zero in on the various means and ways God spoke to each one of them individually. I will dedicate about five pages each to this endeavor.

Prior to the research, I was anticipating that there will be differences in their stories that may be directly impacted by the other historical events that went on during their lifetime. My approach was to first research their lives to get a window into how they each individually heard God speak to them through various means. I included and



provided my personal reflections regarding what I think, learn, and believe to be relevant to this research.

I then used secondary sources to see how other scholars have reflected on the events I have researched to see how their assessment may either agree, enhance, or may change thoughts based on new information that was not previously available to me. As such, this analysis looked at each historical figure beginning with Perpetua who was one of the early Christian martyrs. She refused to renounce her faith to save her life. Next is Patrick who was taken as a prisoner from his homeland in Britain and was sold as a slave to work on a farm in Ireland. The ironic thing about Patrick's story is that he later escaped and returned many years later to evangelize the very people who imprisoned him. Francis' story is unique in that he was led by God to take an oath of poverty and lived a total withdrawal from earthly desires. His total focus became heavenward and on the work that God had for him here on earth.

All three have one thing in common. There was a defining moment for each one of them where their full desire was nothing more than following Christ till the end. They each held true to their calling and were faithful. For Perpetua that time was very short. We are not sure exactly how long it was. It could have been a few weeks to over a month or so. Patrick lived the longest of the three. Francis died at the age of forty-four from an illness. When I learned of this fact I was confused as to why he died so early. He was reported to have healed many people, including raising some from the dead. God could have certainly chosen to heal Francis from his affliction, but he did not.

Each of the three are certainly worthy of study and reading. This research will give us only a glimpse into their faith and how each one lived their lives. For more

information on each, I encourage folks to read about them and learn from their lives. The chapter then concludes with reflections and insights on how this research will be helpful in the formation of the Doctor of Ministry project.

### **Saint Perpetua**

Perpetua is a well-known early Christian martyr of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. She was estimated to be twenty-two years old at the time of her martyrdom in 203 A.D. James D Smith, professor at Bethel Seminary, states that at that time “Roman emperor Septimius Severus forbade conversions to Judaism and Christianity in 202.”<sup>1</sup> Because of Perpetua’s refusal to renounce her faith she was martyred. Since her story is short and well-known, the purpose of this historical account is to focus on her personal relationship with Jesus and the various ways she heard God speaking to her prior to her martyrdom. Perpetua narrated and recorded her own story in the journal she used to capture the events while imprisoned leading up to her martyrdom. The source text I will be using is from, “*The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*.”<sup>2</sup>

Perpetua is described as an unbaptized twenty-two-year-old “young catechumen” when she was taken into custody. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines “catechumen” as “those undergoing training and instruction preparatory to Christian Baptism.”<sup>3</sup> After she was taken into custody her father visited her and pleaded with her to

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<sup>1</sup> James D. Smith, “The Gallery—Wordsmiths of Worship,” *Christian History Magazine: Worship in the Early Church* 37 (1993), Logos eBook.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. “The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas,” *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, trans. R. E. Wallis, vol. 3. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), Logos eBook.

<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2005), s.v. “catechumen.” Logos eBook.

renounce her faith so that she would be released from custody. She responded to her father by saying:

‘Father,’ said I, ‘do you see, let us say, this vessel lying here to be a little pitcher, or something else?’ And he said, ‘I see it to be so.’ And I replied to him, ‘Can it be called by any other name than what it is?’ And he said, ‘No.’ ‘Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian.’<sup>4</sup>

Perpetua understood that the centrality of her identity was as a Christian and not even the threat of death could have her renounce who she was. She was baptized in prison a few days after being taken into custody. After her baptism, the Spirit “prescribed” [it was impressed on her by the Spirit] that after water baptism “nothing else was to be sought for bodily endurance [the Spirit would be her helper].”<sup>5</sup> Her faith was very strong and unwavering. It is clear that her loyalty was to the living Christ her king and not the emperor.

While in prison, Perpetua recounts a visit from her brother:

Then my brother said to me, “My dear sister, you are already in a position of great dignity, and are such that you may ask for a vision, and that it may be made known to you whether this is to result in a passion or an escape.” And I, who knew that I was privileged to converse with the Lord, whose kindnesses I had found to be so great, boldly promised him, and said, “To-morrow I will tell you.” And I asked, and this was what was shown me.<sup>6</sup>

In this short discourse, what jumped out to me was the confidence and faith of her brother. He highlights that she has been granted “great dignity” in that she has been chosen to suffer like Jesus, that she can ask for a vision from God to know the outcome of her imprisonment. My speculation is that the Lord spoke to and impressed upon her

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<sup>4</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 699-700.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 700.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 700.

brother to make such a request to her. Perpetua's faith-filled response indicated that she knew she was "privileged" to talk with the Lord is a hint to the depth of the intimacy she already had as a young convert to converse directly with God.

In her response, Perpetua boldly tells her brother that she will communicate the Lord's response to her brother the next day. Not only is she "privileged" to talk with the Lord, but she has an expectancy that the Lord will answer her even by the next day! I can only guess this is from her own personal experience with previous conversations with the Lord. The Lord communicates his response to her by providing Perpetua with a vivid detailed vision where she saw:

I saw a golden ladder of marvellous height, reaching up even to heaven, and very narrow, so that persons could only ascend it one by one; and on the sides of the ladder was fixed every kind of iron weapon. There were there swords, lances, hooks, daggers; so that if any one went up carelessly, or not looking upwards, he would be torn to pieces and his flesh would cleave to the iron weapons. And under the ladder itself was crouching a dragon of wonderful size, who lay in wait for those who ascended, and frightened them from the ascent. And Saturus went up first, who had subsequently delivered himself up freely on our account, not having been present at the time that we were taken prisoners. And he attained the top of the ladder, and turned towards me, and said to me, 'Perpetua, I am waiting for you; but be careful that the dragon do (sic) not bite you.' And I said, 'In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall not hurt me.' And from under the ladder itself, as if in fear of me, he slowly lifted up his head; and as I trod upon the first step, I trod upon his head. And I went up, and I saw an immense extent of garden, and in the midst of the garden a white-haired man sitting in the dress of a shepherd, of a large stature, milking sheep; and standing around were many thousand white-robed ones. And he raised his head, and looked upon me, and said to me, 'Thou art welcome, daughter.' And he called me, and from the cheese as he was milking he gave me as it were a little cake, and I received it with folded hands; and I ate it, and all who stood around said Amen. And at the sound of their voices I was awakened, still tasting a sweetness which I cannot describe.<sup>7</sup>

One of the things that most struck me in her vision was the "white-haired man sitting in the dress of a shepherd" that speaks to Perpetua in the vision "Thou art

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<sup>7</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 700.

welcome, daughter.” I wonder if this was a recognition of her thanks, either for the response of her request for the vision or for the supernatural help she would receive on the day she successfully climbed that metaphorical ladder. The “Thou are welcome” could likewise mean that she was simply welcomed into heaven. I believe it is a little of all of the above as the vision answered her question, encouraged her to be unafraid, and gave her assurance that she is welcomed into heaven. I love how the vision ended with her being given a small cake to eat and when she woke up and she could still taste the sweetness of the cake in her mouth.<sup>8</sup>

In the two examples above, we see demonstrated that Perpetua talks directly with the Lord, the Lord communicates to her in a dream through speech (she heard the Lord speak), through a vivid vision (sight), and speaks to her through her taste buds (in this case the taste of the cake) that she ate at the end of her vision from the Lord. After she communicates the details of the vision to her brother, they both discern together that her imprisonment will end in martyrdom. The discernment of the meaning of the vision was not Perpetua’s alone. It was confirmed with her brother as they discerned the meaning of the vision together with the help of the Spirit. This was another way the Lord communicated supernaturally to and through Perpetua.

God communicates to her again in a new way through testimony that manifested physically in her body. After she, and those with her, refused to renounce the faith and instead held fast to their confession that they were Christians we read in her journal:

The procurator then delivers judgment on all of us, and condemns us to the wild beasts, and we went down cheerfully to the dungeon. Then, because my child had been used to receive suck from me, and to stay with me in the prison, I send Pomponius the deacon to my father to ask for the infant, but my father would not

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<sup>8</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 700.

give it him. And even as God willed it, the child no long desired the breast, nor did my breast cause me uneasiness, lest I should be tormented by care for my babe and by the pain of my breasts at once.<sup>9</sup>

Perpetua had been nursing her son in the prison. After she was condemned to death her father refused to return her son to the prison. Based on her journal Perpetua must have received testimony from the deacon Pomponius whom she sent to her father. She testifies that according to God's will "the child no long desired the breast, nor did her breast cause me uneasiness." What a blessing for both Perpetua and her baby that God ministered physically to both her and her baby. Truly an act of God's mercy toward them. Perpetua took this as a confirmation that she was following God's will for her life.

Perpetua had a couple of other visions one of which was of her brother who died of cancer at the age of seven. In the vision she received assurance from God that her dead brother received salvation, that is, "he was translated from the place of punishment."<sup>10</sup> This certainly challenges my theology as I would believe that a seven-year-old is already with God. What I believe is more telling, is that God was pleased to ease her mind by giving her a vision that her brother is ok so that her focus and strength can be walking out her final days in God's light and power. She would need all the strength she had to face her final battle. In the end what is remarkable is that Perpetua and her friend's final martyrdoms were very close to the visions and impressions they received. The final account of their deaths was recorded by an unknown editor.

I wonder and suspect that the vision of her seven-year-old brother that brought fear, concern, and worry into her spirit was from the evil one, Satan. Just as the Lord can

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<sup>9</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 701.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, *Latin Christianity*, 701-702.

speak to us, so can the devil. For instance, Satan spoke with and tempted Jesus three times in Matthew 4, thereby attempting him to step out of God's will for his life. I believe this was the devil's attempt to thwart God's plans for Perpetua's upcoming victory. It is quite clear to many who wrote and reflected on her life that God spoke to Perpetua by using a variety of means. After Perpetua's death she was later declared one of the Saints of the early church.

Historian and author, Lacey Baldwin Smith, in his book, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World*, was very critical of Christian motives for martyrdom in his book. He writes:

...the Christians became the originators of a theory of martyrdom that transformed suffering into a matter of free will and fashioned foolhardy disobedience and obduracy into divine necessity.

Early Christianity was obsessed with death by martyrdom to a degree that goes far beyond any normal collective effort to withstand the terror of persecution.<sup>11</sup>

To one outside the faith these comments may appear to be true, but to those within the faith, who have heard God speak personally to them, it is not a matter of free will but instead of simple obedience to Christ as one is called and led by the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm not sure what I would have done if I were Perpetua, but I hope that given the same circumstances I would courageously by faith walk in her footsteps.

Smith also comments that:

Perpetua began to display a selfishness and cruelty that is deeply disturbing. She made herself deaf to her father's cries of love and his pleas that she consider someone other than herself. She started with normal human anguish for her child's welfare but ended by dismissing the infant the moment her breasts ceased to hurt.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 1827, Kindle.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 2389.

I could certainly see how a martyr in these circumstances could be viewed as selfish. According to Perpetua's journal I do not read in it that she dismissed her son to any degree. She wanted to see her son and her father refused to send him. She instead took the relief from her breast as an encouragement and divine sign that spoke to her that this was within the will of God.

I am also biased toward Perpetua and her story due to a time in my life when I believed God was asking me to risk my life for a woman I did not know who had no control over those who imprisoned her and threatened to stone her to death because she was a Christian. I believed at the time God was asking me to go to the media and announce that I would like to trade my life for her life. At the time I was too afraid to follow through or even talk with other people to discern if this was God's will. I was not sure if that is what God was really asking me to do.

### **Saint Patrick**

Saint Patrick recorded his own story. When Patrick was nearly sixteen years old, he was taken captive by Irish pirates and brought to Ireland along with several thousand others. At that time, he was raised in the faith but he did not personally know God.<sup>13</sup> He came to know and believe in God during his captivity. While in captivity he was tending sheep regularly. After six years as a slave Patrick had developed a heart of prayer. He would pray a couple of hundred times a day and through the night. Patrick was even

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick, "The Confession of St. Patrick," in *Ten Early Christian Saints: Polycarp, Perpetua and Felicitas, Cyprian, Eusebius, Antony, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Jerome, Patrick, Benedict* (Classic Christian eBooks), 5859, Kindle.



“roused” to pray before dawn by the Lord, “in snow, and ice, and rain, and felt no injury from it.”<sup>14</sup> One night while sleeping, God spoke to Patrick. The Lord spoke to him through an inner voice and spiritual sight.

...“Thou dost fast well; fasting thou shalt soon go to thy country.” And again, after a very short time, I heard a response, saying to me: “Behold, thy ship is ready.” And the place was not near, but perhaps about two hundred miles distant, and I had never been there, nor did I know any one who lived there.”

Soon after this, I fled, and left the man with whom I had been six years, and I came in the strength of the Lord, who directed my way for good: and I feared nothing until I arrived at that ship. And the day on which I came the ship had moved out of place; and I asked to go and sail with them, but the master was displeased, and replied angrily: “Do not seek to go with us.” And when I heard this, I went from them to go thither where I had lodged; and I began to pray as I went; but before I had ended my prayer, I heard one of them calling out loudly after me, “Come quickly, for these men are calling you”...<sup>15</sup>

In the above excerpt, Patrick hears the Lord speaking to him. The Lord’s comments to Patrick that he “fasts well” would also be an indication that the Lord sees and is taking note of his disciplined life. He like Perpetua is willing to deny the flesh for the sake of Christ. The Lord further states that “fasting thou shalt soon go to thy country.” Later Patrick heard the Lord speaking to him again saying, “Behold thy ship is ready.” Patrick’s relationship with the Lord is very close at this point. The Lord next directs Patrick’s way to the ship, which takes him on a 200-mile journey. He goes in the “strength of the Lord.” Philip Freeman, author and Fletcher Jones Chair of Western Culture at Pepperdine, states that “...the practical difficulties he faced were enormous. He would have to avoid contact with everyone, moving only at night, and then far away

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5908.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5915.

from settlements.”<sup>16</sup> I can just imagine the Lord saying, this way, over that hill, stop here and sleep for the night, and so on.

The prompting to go by the Spirit must have been strong as Patrick records that it is not until after escaping captivity and traveling over 200 miles when he arrives at the ship, that fear enters Patrick’s spirit. Could that have been a moment when he stopped relying on the Lord’s promptings or maybe he was concerned that he would be caught at the last minute? He steps out in faith and encounters the master of the ship who tells him he cannot go with them. As Patrick walks away, he immediately starts to talk with God and before their conversation is complete, he is called back by one of them to come quickly and board the ship.<sup>17</sup>

From the time Patrick escaped from captivity until he reached his relatives in Britain a few years had passed.<sup>18</sup> Sometime after he returned to his own country (as the Lord had previously declared to him would happen), the Lord spoke to Patrick again, this time through a vision in the night. In this vision three of his senses were activated; he saw, heard, and felt the following:

...a man who appeared to come from Ireland, whose name was Victorious, and he had innumerable letters with him, one of which he gave to me; and I read the commencement of the epistle containing “The Voice of the Irish”; and as I read aloud the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard in my mind the voice of those who were near the wood of Focluti, which is near the western sea; and they cried out: “We entreat thee, holy youth, to come and walk still amongst us.” And my heart was greatly touched, so that I could not read any more, and so I awoke.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland: A Biography* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 33, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5914.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5931.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5936.

Patrick first recognizes, I'm assuming by the way the man was dressed, a man from Ireland (the place he just escaped from). The man's name was Victorious who gives him a letter called "The Voice of the Irish." Patrick heard the voices in his mind of those he knew when in captivity and recognized the specific location they were in as they cried out to him "the holy youth" to return. In the vision his heart was so moved that he could read no more and woke up. This vision became imprinted on his heart.

Thomas Olden, theologian and author, who translated Patrick's confession from the original Latin as recorded in *The Confession of St. Patrick: Translated from the Original Latin with an Introduction and Notes*, more often refers to Patrick's dreams instead of visions.<sup>20</sup> The translation I chose to use does not use the word "dream" except when used in the context of Scripture verses. The choice of words Patrick used could certainly mean it was a dream i.e. while sleeping...I saw or heard. It appears that in Patrick's confession God most likely spoke to him in dreams and visions. He also heard God's voice but his writing does not distinguish if it was an audible or inner voice.

Immediately following this vision Patrick notes "Thanks be to God that, after many years, the Lord hath granted them their desire."<sup>21</sup> We do not know exactly when he returned only that it was many years later. We know from his story several thousand came to believe and were baptized as a result of his obedience in the Lord.

Patrick writes again (we do not know the time frames between each of the divine communications):

And on another night, whether in me or near me God knows, I heard eloquent words which I could not understand until the end of the speech, when it was said:

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<sup>20</sup> Patrick, *The Confession of St. Patrick: Translated from the Original Latin with an Introduction and Notes*, trans. Thomas Olden (Dublin, London: CrossReach Publications, 2016), 38, Kindle.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5936.

“He who gave His life for thee is He who speaks in thee”; and so I awoke full of joy.<sup>22</sup>

The Lord speaks to Patrick again and this time identifies that it is himself, Jesus, who is the one speaking to him. It was nice of the Lord to clarify for Patrick that it was he indeed who was the one speaking to him.

The Lord communicates again to Patrick through another vision:

And again, I saw one praying within me, and I was, as it were, within my body, and I heard, that is, above the inner man, and there prayed earnestly with groans. And I was amazed at this, and marveled, and considered who this could be who prayed in me. But at the end of the prayer it came to pass that it was a bishop [some English copies translate ‘a bishop’ to ‘the Spirit’<sup>23</sup>], and I awoke and remembered that the apostle said: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.”<sup>24</sup>

This one begins with “I saw one praying within me...” Patrick saw, heard, and felt “earnest prayers with groans.” Patrick even asked himself during the vision who this could be. Patrick notes that at the end of the vision it was a bishop. This is my preferred translation as I believe that God gave Patrick a prophetic picture of himself as a future bishop praying in the Spirit. Confirming my preferred translation with historical facts is beyond the scope of this chapter. It is also most likely an act of futility given that “the oldest surviving copy of the Confession, [that was] written out by the scribe Ferdomnach around the year 807, [was] more than three centuries after the death of Patrick.”

I believe this could have been part of Patrick’s calling to pursue becoming ordained which would eventually lead to him becoming a bishop. The alternate

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<sup>22</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5941.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick, *The Confession of St. Patrick*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5942.

translation of “the Spirit” is also viable. Neither takes away from the supernatural way the Lord communicated and led Patrick on his journey which did take him back to Ireland “after very many years”<sup>25</sup> where we are told he preached to the very people who imprisoned him.

My reflections on this are somewhat biased. When I read this section, it immediately reminded me of a time, where God showed me a picture of a woman preaching to an audience of people and it was later discerned to me by the Spirit that it was me. Therefore, I see the probability of it being an accurate translation even though translating “the Spirit” makes common sense.

As noted above, many of these divine communications came through dreams and visions. Each of these instances where the Lord spoke to Patrick encouraged him, directed, and strengthened him for the journey. His encounters were supernatural communications and interventions by our Lord and God who created all things and who was actively involved in Patrick’s life.

### **Saint Francis**

The primary source text for this research on St. Francis is from, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography of St. Francis of Assisi and Stories of His Followers*, as recorded by St. Bonaventure. Saint Francis was from the town of Assisi where Francis grew up in an affluent home. Francis later developed such a heart for the poor that “he resolved within himself to give to everyone who should ask of him, and especially if the

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<sup>25</sup> Patrick, *Ten Early Christian Saints*, 5936.

petitions were made in the Name of God.”<sup>26</sup> It was however not until the Lord used an “affliction” where St. Francis suffered greatly from an illness, that was attributed “by the right hand of the Most High,” so that “his soul might be prepared to receive the unction of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>27</sup> Prior to this time Francis was worldly and primarily acted on his own accord.

After his recovery, Francis met a poor soldier and he felt a “tender and sorrowful compassion” for him and was compelled to literally take off the new clothes he was wearing and give them to the soldier. The following night the Lord spoke to Francis for the first time in a vision where he saw:

...a spacious and beautiful palace filled with arms and military ensigns, all marked with the Cross of Christ, to make known to him that his charitable deed done to the poor soldier for the love of the great King of Heaven should receive an unspeakable reward. And when he asked for who all these things were reserved, a divine voice answered him that they were for him and for his soldiers.<sup>28</sup>

After Francis woke up, he used his own intellect to discern and act on the meaning of the vision. He misinterpreted the vision by believing that he will receive earthly military honor and recognition. He takes off to Apulia to enlist into the service of a Count in hopes of achieving military honor and reward the vision revealed to him. While on the way to the city the Lord has a conversation with him and corrects Francis’ faulty interpretation by talking to him as one would a friend. The Lord begins by asking him a question:

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<sup>26</sup> Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography of St. Francis of Assisi and Stories of His Followers* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: TAN Books, 2010), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 3.

“Francis, who can do the most for thee—the Lord or the servant, the rich man or the poor?” And when Francis replied that the Lord and the rich man could do more for him than the poor, “Wherefore, then,” said the voice, “dost thou leave the Lord for the servant, and the God of infinite riches for a poor mortal?” Then said Francis, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” And the Lord answered: “Return home for the vision which thou hast seen prefigured a spiritual work which thou shalt bring to pass, not by human counsel, but by divine disposition.”<sup>29</sup>

After this experience, Francis “awaited in obedience the revelation of the Will of God”<sup>30</sup> to come. This experience with the Lord was so powerful that he withdrew from worldly affairs and began developing the practice of frequent prayer. As Francis spent more time in prayer (prayer is essentially a two-way conversation with God that involves both our talking to and listening to what God is saying back to us) his desire for heavenly things continued to increase within him in greater and greater measure.

God next used an encounter with a leper who mysteriously appeared and disappeared out of nowhere to speak to Francis while he was out riding a horse in the plains of Assisi where:

... he met a leper, whose sudden appearance filled him with fear and horror; but forthwith calling to mind the resolution which he made to follow after perfection, and remembering that if he would be a soldier for Christ he must first overcome himself, he dismounted from his horse and went to meet the leper, that he might embrace him: and when the poor man stretched out his hand to receive an alms, he kissed it and filled it with money. Having again mounted his horse, he looked around him over the wide and open plain, but nowhere could he see the leper; upon which, being filled with wonder and joy, he began devoutly to give thanks to God, purposing within himself to proceed to still greater things than this.<sup>31</sup>

This divine encounter gave Francis an opportunity to really see if his resolve to be a soldier for Christ would be lived out. When Francis saw the leper, he was immediately

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<sup>29</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 4.

filled with “fear and horror.” This divine appointment with the leper was another way the Lord used to speak to Francis’ heart to overcome the worldly pull on his life. We should note that this “leper” had both a sudden appearance and disappearance. Was this a visionary experience rather than a physical one or was it an angelic encounter with an angel or Jesus taking the form of a leper?

Regarding Francis’ surprise encounter with the leper, Murray Bodo, who is a Franciscan priest and author of *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*, comments that Francis:

All his life long he had panicked when he met a person with leprosy. And then one day on the road below Assisi, he did one of those surprising things that only the power of Jesus’ Spirit could explain. He reached out and touched such a one, the very sight of whom nauseated him. He felt his knees playing tricks on him, and he was afraid he would not make it to the leper standing humbly before him. The odor of rotting flesh attacked his senses as if he were smelling with his eyes and ears as well.<sup>32</sup>

Murray in his poetic style gives us a vivid picture of Francis’ meeting of the leper, including the thoughts, feeling, and even unpleasant odors that Francis may have encountered. I have to admit that after reading Francis encounter with the leper I felt convicted in my spirit that I need to better learn how to love the least, the last, and the

Francis next steps up his prayer life. Instead of frequent prayer he now moves to more continuous prayer. St. Bonaventure recounts that

...he became wholly absorbed in God, when Jesus Christ appeared to him under the form of a Crucifix, at which sight his whole soul seemed to melt away; and so deeply was the memory of Christ’s Passion impressed on his heart, that it pierced even to the marrow of his bones. From that hour, whenever he thought upon the Passion of Christ, he could scarcely restrain his tears and sighs; for he then understood (as he made known to some of his familiar friends not long before his death) that these words of the gospel were addressed to him: “If thou wilt come

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<sup>32</sup> Murray Bodo, *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*, 40<sup>th</sup> ann. ed. (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2011), 21, Kindle.



after Me, deny thyself, and take up they cross and follow Me.” And from that day forth he clothed himself with the spirit of poverty, the sense of humility and the affection of interior piety.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus’ appearance to him on the cross pierced him right through his soul and body. He was so moved by this experience that he knew that Scripture was addressed to him.

Another way the Lord spoke into Francis’ life most assuredly was through Scripture.

One day while Francis was out he noticed a church, St. Damian, that was in need of repair. At the leading of the Spirit (another way God spoke to him), Francis goes in to pray and the Lord speaks to him while he is lying prostrate on the floor. While praying and gazing at the crucifix, Francis is moved to the point of tears in his spirit. He hears a voice that said to him three times “Francis, go and build up My house, which, as thou seest, is falling into ruin.”<sup>34</sup> After some time Francis “in perfect obedience” rebuilds the church of St. Damian, St. Peter’s, and St. Mary of the Angels where he had “frequent angelical visitations” while at that church.<sup>35</sup>

It is noted by St. Bonaventure that although Francis’ call was greater than the rebuilding of three literal churches, that God’s intent was that he would build up the body of Christ. This happened by the formation of the Order of the Friars Minor, where Francis received a spiritual foundation for the building up of the church by the institution of the rules for the order that are still in effect today.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 7- 8, 13.

## Conclusion

The study of Saint Perpetua, Saint Patrick, and Saint Francis has certainly impacted me. Many times, during the reading, reflecting, and writing, the Lord spoke to my inner self. My faith has grown by their witness and testimony. Each one of these historical figures had a moment of complete surrender of their lives to the Lord. This research has created in me a hunger and thirst to learn more about the men and women in the early church. Many of the ways that God spoke to each of their lives can be examples that can be used for the Doctor of Ministry project.

I believe that teaching on this material as part of the project will be foundational in that it will strengthen and encourage the participants' faith as it did my own. Additionally, my hope is that one of the outcomes of this project is that those who participate in it will both gain confidence in and reaffirm that God has already been speaking to each of their lives and they will be able to recognize His voice more clearly as a result. After this research, I really believe I can hear God more clearly.

The other transformation that is occurring within me is that my hunger and thirst to have a more intimate relationship with God will mean making greater sacrifices in this next phase of my relationship with Jesus. The more I grow closer to God the more I crave to grow even closer. It is kind of like how Francis' desire to purpose his heart for greater things than these after his divine encounter with the leper. I anticipate that this too will be an outcome of the project in the lives of the participants.

Another thing that has come to mind during this research is a Scripture that the Lord put on my heart some time ago in 2 Timothy 2:20-21 that reads:

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse

themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

The lives of St. Perpetua, St. Patrick, and St. Francis all remind me of people of the faith that have cleansed themselves from worldly concerns and devoted themselves wholly to the Lord, ready and prepared to do any good work. They were completely sold out for Christ.

My hope for this Doctor of Ministry project is that the participants in this project will have a spiritual awakening as they make time to tune into, recognize, and reflect on what God is and has been speaking to them. My hope is they will not only hear God's voice but respond with faithful obedience to what God is saying. My desire is that they will have increased confidence to step out in faith to be the people God is creating them to be and to go where God leads.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### Introduction

The main theological theme related to this project is God's self-revealing love that desires, seeks to know, be in relationship with, and communicate with humanity both individually and corporately through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible is the recorded story of God and humanity in this endeavor of God's desire to be in relationship with the people God created. At the crux of the matter is how do we and God communicate with one another. To know someone, we must learn how to communicate with them. Communication is two way, both speaking and listening. Communication is also much more than words and hearing. It also involves our senses, like tone of voice, touch, facial expressions, and actions, etc., all of which play a part in how we communicate with and come to know one another on a human level. Just as we use our senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell) to communicate with one another. John Wesley wrote about this in his sermon on the New Birth. He essentially says that after we are born again, our spiritual senses are opened through faith.<sup>1</sup>

Theologically, from the start, we must make a distinction between God's self-disclosure in terms of the general revelation of God that is available to all people and

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 339-340.

special revelation that is only discerned through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by faith. In this sense, Scripture by nature, is general revelation since it is available to all. After a person become a born-again believer, they can now hear Jesus' voice because God has opened that sixth spiritual sense. There is theological agreement from Christian scholars that all revelation from God received by others must be aligned with and not contradict Scripture (what God spoke by the Law and prophets).<sup>2</sup>

The subthemes of this project are how do we discover and learn the ways we (finite humanity) communicate (hear, speak, taste, touch, and see) with the invisible (and yet perceivable) infinite God. Learning and teaching others the ways God speaks to people is important. God can only be known through God's self-disclosure of himself to us, similarly to how we get to know a friend or how parents and children communicate and get to know one another. In this chapter I will explore the theological foundations of the ways God speaks and reveals himself to us individually and communally.

The main theological issue related to this project is related to answering the question whether God still speaks to people today apart from Scripture. All Christians acknowledge that God has spoken directly. We could not have the Scriptures if God had not. The Bible from beginning to end is full of examples of God speaking to people directly and through prophets. Furthermore, all Christians believe God "spoke" via His incarnate Word. The question is whether God continues to speak to His people as he did to the various people and prophets after the Christian canon was set. Prophet is even an

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<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Scott Kisker during focus group on March 19, 20, 21, 2019.

office in the New Testament Church (Eph 4:11), though some would argue that this office is restricted to illuminating the canonical texts, after they were established.<sup>3</sup>

Most if not all theologians agree that Scripture is one way God speaks to people today. The question is whether God still speaks to people via other means (through our thoughts, dreams, visions, impressions, prophecy, etc.) today. If so, how and within what parameters? Does the supernatural gift and sense of faith include discerning and knowing God through supernatural sight, sounds, touch, smells, and taste?

There is division among theologians, especially from cessationist theologians who claim that the revelation or manifestations of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (wisdom, knowledge, healing, miraculous powers, etc.) ceased after the early church. Continuationists believe that these supernatural manifestations are real and tangible ways that God makes himself known and hence God communicates to us today both individually and corporately. We come to know those with whom we are in close personal relationship not only by what they say, but also by how they act. This is similar to how a hug can communicate our real presence with another individual as mere words cannot.

The theological relevance of this subject and project are great. Learning to hear and know God in deeper and more personal ways is a topic that is discussed more and more. However, there is still a large portion of the church that does not teach people how to hear God's voice apart from Scripture. Jesus declares that his sheep hear his voice and they follow him. It is hard to follow someone we cannot hear and know.

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<sup>3</sup> Conversation with Scott Kisker during focus group on March 21, 2019.

The western church is in a state of decline. Awakening our hearts to the many ways God speaks through word and deed, as well as signs and wonders, could be what ignites God's people and the church. Too many Christians have head knowledge about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but as I've heard for many years knowing God is about bringing the head knowledge into our hearts and lives experientially. The only way that happens is when we hear the Word and it is planted into our hearts and is then lived out in our lives. Real life and community transformation happen after we hear and obey.

Engaging with both classical and modern theologians will be important as we have a rich heritage of classical theologians who have clearly heard and developed a personal relationship with God. They have much to teach us about hearing God's voice today. Modern theologians have insight and learning as to how we have gotten to where we are today. They also have new insights from the vast wealth of learning throughout history. Practical application and thought from both will enhance our understanding of how to hear God's voice and make us better listeners. Iron sharpens iron.

The theological themes and issues in this introduction will be expanded and reflected on to bring clarity and a solid theological base for this project. Theological foundations for learning how to develop a personal relationship with Jesus with open clear communication is crucial for establishing spiritual vitality personally and corporately as a body of believers. Dr. Rob McCorkle, founder of Fire School Ministries, said many times in his book, *Bridging the Great Divide: Reuniting Word and Spirit*, and

at his conferences that “life is in the voice.”<sup>4</sup> If we cannot hear his voice, we will not have life and have it to the full.

### **God’s Self-Revealing Love**

The main theological theme related to this project is revelation from God. To know God, God must reveal God’s self to us. To begin our theological inquiry, we will briefly look at a few definitions of revelation that may help us as we explore what revelation from God is and how God communicates and reveals himself to people and communities. *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* defines revelation as:

Term from the Latin *revelatio*, referring to either the act of revealing or making known, or the thing which is revealed. In theology it designates God’s own self-disclosure or manifesting of himself, or things concerning himself and the world; it may also mean the word itself, oral or written, which bears such revelation.<sup>5</sup>

The main point to highlight in this definition is that God makes himself known to us; both personal things about God and the world.

God chooses to make himself known and to be in relationship with humanity. We would not know God if God did not choose to make himself known to us. God makes God’s self known through direct communication (first spoken and then written and made into the Christian canon) and through the manifestation of God’s self to us in sensible ways; such as speaking to Moses from a burning bush (Ex 3), the splitting of the sea (Ex 14:21), the pouring out of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4), and Peter healing a lame man (Acts 3:6-7). The Bible is the recorded testimony of God’s love in words,

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<sup>4</sup> Rob McCorkle, *Bridging the Great Divide: Reuniting Word and Spirit* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2015), 279, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Revelation,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1844, Logos ebook.



actions, and the manifestation of God's self throughout time. God, out of his love for humanity, desires to be in relationship with everyone.

*The Lexham Theological Wordbook* defines revelation as:

Divine revelation is communication from God in various forms (such as dreams, direct speech, or written text) and through various means (such as a theophany, angels, prophets, or nature). This communication is knowledge that is hidden from men or previously unknown to men, which is given to humans from God.<sup>6</sup>

This definition highlights that revelation from God is communication in various forms and various means. A few examples of the ways God communicates to humanity are listed along with various means of communication. God can communicate and reveal God's self through angels, prophets, dreams, direct speech and the like. At the heart of this definition is an important distinction about God's self-revealing nature, namely that the things God reveals to us are things that were previously unknown to us and would not be known if God did not choose to reveal them. Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra in their book, *Introduction to Theology*, says it this way: "Thus the knowledge of God that we receive through revelation is not the kind of knowledge we could gain in any other way."<sup>7</sup> Hence it must be revealed.

This can be indirect in that we sense a miracle with our natural senses (we see it). This can also be direct in that we perceive God through our awakened "eyes of the heart" via faith (our supernatural sense by which we feel and hear God). Scripture is a mix. It begins with direct speech (the Law and the Prophets for example), is encountered as the rule of faith (the Christian canon) with our natural senses. We read it with our natural

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Scott Robertson, "Divine Revelation" ed. Douglas Mangum, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst, *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Logos ebook.

<sup>7</sup> Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA, 2002), 23.

eyes and speak it with our mouth. It becomes direct again as we encounter the living Words through the words.

An example of God revealing knowledge that could not be known by any other way to me happened during a Sunday morning service in December 2018. During the service, God revealed a word of knowledge to me via a specific physical headache that manifested in me as a pain throbbing on the right side of my head. Since I had recently been trained on words of knowledge (one of the manifestations of Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11) at a Global Awakening conference, when I felt this unusual pain, I knew to ask God if this was my pain or a pain someone else was experiencing. I had the impression it was for someone else. I jumped up after the worship and asked if anyone had this specific pain and one of our youth said, "it is me." We prayed a short prayer and their pain immediately got better and then was completely gone by the end of the service. My pain also went away just after the prayer. I am thankful God manifested himself to us that day. It was a tangible touch from God in a Sunday morning service.

One of my favorite definitions on what revelation is, comes from theologian and author Donald Bloesch, in his book, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation*. There he writes:

Revelation is a "meeting" between God and the believer whereby God speaks and we hear. The "spoken word" is a metaphor containing two elements: personal encounter and the impartation of knowledge. The Hebrew word *galah* is used to refer both to God's self-manifestation and the communication of his message. In the New Testament revelation is both unveiling (Greek *apokalypsis*) and manifestation (*phaneroo*, *phane- rosis*). It is also associated with *epiphaneia*, which denotes the appearance of divinity in earthly history. Revelation entails both divine presence and divine meaning.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 476, Kindle.

Each of the definitions refers to God's self-disclosure to humanity. We do not know someone unless they choose to make themselves known. The same is true with God. We cannot know God without God revealing God's self to us. God chooses and desires to be in relationship with humanity. God is the one who takes the initiative in this relationship. This desire for God to be in relationship with us is birthed out of God's love for humanity. The greatest example of this is the sending of Jesus into the world (John 3:16-17). The biblical witness from the beginning to the end (Genesis through Revelation) supports God's desire to be in a personal relationship with all people. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). God took the initiative by wooing us to God's self.

Bloesch, additionally says:

The event of revelation has two poles: the historical and the experiential. Revelation is God speaking and the human being responding through the power of God's Spirit. God speaks not only in the Bible but also in the human heart. Revelation is the conjunction of divine revealing action and human response. The external knowledge of Scripture is united with the internal knowledge given by the Holy Spirit....Revelation occurs when the same Spirit who spoke by the mouth of the prophets and apostles finds entry into our hearts,...Revelation happened in a final and definitive form in the apostolic encounter with Jesus Christ. But revelation happens again and again in the experience of the Spirit of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

The important point in Bloesch's insights is that revelation is more than personal or communal knowledge. It is an intentional revealed self-disclosure of God's self, an exchange between God and other people (individual or communally) that touches the heart and moves us by the Holy Spirit through faith to respond with action.

The intent of this chapter is not to go through an in-depth theological discussion on the different sub-categories of revelation (natural, general, special, continuing, final,

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<sup>9</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 487.

etc.), but to instead hone in on the theological background of the ways and means that God speaks to Christians, those who profess to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as revealed in the Old and New Testaments. Many theologians agree that Scripture is the main way God speaks to people today. This seems to be the default and may be a result of a lack of teaching people how to hear God's voice. The Biblical and Historical Foundation chapters suggest that God speaks directly and personally to people in their everyday lives. Scripture is not the only way God communicates to his people, just as the above definitions allude to other means. There is theological agreement from scholars that revelation from God, regardless of its classification, must be aligned with the word of God and not contradict the Bible that records what God has already said. In this sense, Scripture is the measuring stick, it is the rule by which all revelation is judged. Life is in the voice, not the book.<sup>10</sup>

### **God is Speaking**

God is speaking. Are we listening? How do we teach people to hear God's voice? This is the crux of the matter. The subthemes of this project are how do we discover and learn the ways we (finite humanity) communicate (hear, speak, taste, touch, and see) with the invisible (and the not so invisible and infinite) God. Craig Keener, Theologian and Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary writes that:

One of the first steps we should take in knowing God's voice is knowing God's heart. If we know the God of the Bible—the God of the cross—we will recognize the true Spirit of God when he speaks to us. Of course, God sometimes reveals himself to us by his Spirit within us first before we understand Scripture fully. But

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<sup>10</sup> Conversation with Frank Billman.

the heart of God we come to know through prayer is the same heart of God we find in Scripture when we search it with hearts humbled before him.<sup>11</sup>

Learning and teaching others to hear God's voice takes time. Similar to how we get to know a friend or how parents and children get to know one another, their relationships grow over time.

In this chapter we will explore the theological foundations of the ways God speaks and reveals himself to us individually and communally. We will explore three main ways that God speaks today: Scripture, the inner voice (thoughts, feelings, and impressions), and through, pictures, dreams and visions. God is not limited to these three main ways. The common thread to all communication with God is the awakening and activation of our supernatural sensory perception through faith.

### *God Speaks: Scripture*

Scripture is by far the most common way God speaks to Christians today. Donald Bloesch, wrote in his book, *Holy Scripture Revelation, Inspiration, & Interpretation*:

Scripture in itself is the written Word of God, comprising by virtue of its divine inspiration a reliable witness to the truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ. But it becomes the living Word when it actually communicates to us the truth and power of the cross of Christ through the illumination of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

When we read God's word devotionally God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. We then use the Scripture as the "rule of canon" to know if what God said to us is from God.

One example of this is the historic practice of *Lectio Divina*. James C. Whilhoit, Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College, and Evan B. Howard, Director of

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<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 21, Kindle.

<sup>12</sup> Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 216.

the Spirituality Shoppe: An Evangelical Center for the Study of Christian Spirituality, co-authored the book, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life*, they wrote:

It [the Bible] is a written document of intentional communication from one living person (God is personal) to another. Paul proclaimed, "All scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16). This word inspired literally means "God breathed." Just as God breathed life into humankind through the Spirit in Genesis 2, so God, through the Spirit inspires/breathes himself to humankind through the Scriptures. This is why Christians see the Bible as a living book. "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"<sup>13</sup>

This quote highlights that the Bible contains intentional communication from God to humanity. God continues to reveal himself directly to people and communities throughout time so that we can know God more deeply. God's word is timeless and continues to speak to people in all times and places to those who are listening. Scripture is a living word that continues to speak to people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. As the living word, it continues to accomplish its purposes as people read it. We cannot understand the Bible apart from the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is the primary lens we use as our guide to all truth and theological reflection. Scripture becomes God's living word when a passage or verse is illumined to the reader by the Holy Spirit. This is the point where the written word intersects with the believer's mind and heart. A foundational spiritual practice of learning to read the Bible devotionally since the 3rd century is called *Lectio Divina*, which simply means "divine

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<sup>13</sup> James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 337, Kindle.

reading.” An article from the Montecassino Abbey had to say the following about Lectio

Divina:

The ancient practice of Lectio Divina literally means "divine reading" and is a method of prayer, study, and meditation fundamental to Benedictine life since the 6th century. Traditionally practiced individually and privately, the Lectio Divina approaches the study and prayer of scripture as something to be calmly and carefully absorbed and understood. The ultimate goal to this spiritual technique is to spend some time, physically and mentally, with God through his word.

The Lectio Divina is divided into different phases: reading/listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. The rhythm of the Lectio Divina is a gentle alternation between action and reception: reading the words and thereby entering a conversation with God. By focusing on a selected scripture, one waits and listens for God's voice. The individual practicing Lectio Divina is both listening to and speaking with God, united with Him via his words.<sup>14</sup>

The practice as learned has people engaging in a conversation with God by actively reading aloud, listening, meditating, and contemplation of the text (the living word and the Holy Spirit living within us). In this process we are actively listening for and anticipating God to speak to us.

As we enter the conversation with God around a given text, we are engaging our heart, thoughts, mind, imagination, senses, our very being. When God speaks a fresh encouraging and/or timely word that we put into practice we become transformed by it. As a result, new life is typically experienced in our current and/or future circumstances.

Wilhoit suggests asking ourselves questions while we are learning this practice of engagement with Scripture. He says,

For example, you may want to ask yourself a few questions while (or after) you read a passage of Scripture as a way to help you be aware of the Spirit's work:

- What have I been thinking about as I have read this passage? Why?

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<sup>14</sup> Montecassino Abbey, “*Worship: Lectio Divina*,” Montecassino Abbey, accessed November 24, 2018, <http://www.abbaziamontecassino.org/abbey/index.php/en/worship/lectio-divina>.

- Are there any particular thoughts, questions or ideas that have come up?
- Have I noticed any graces or sins in my life as I have been reading? What kinds of responses do I notice?
- What have I seen of the Lord in my reading, of God's character or works? How am I led to respond to what I see of God?
- Do I notice any inclinations to action as I read this passage? What might be underneath these inclinations?
- What feelings have accompanied my reading? Why?

These questions give us a sample of a lectio-cultivated watchfulness.<sup>15</sup>

Lectio divina is a practice that must be learned. We cannot read about it; we must experience it to understand it. Just as we cannot learn to ride a bike by reading the user manual. Our bodies only learn how to achieve balance on a bike by riding it.

Teaching others to learn how to hear God's voice through this ancient practice can be an opening to better learning how to hear God's voice outside of Scripture. God speaks to us through a multitude of ways. Scripture engagement however should become a regular practice as we seek to hear God's voice in our lives. In Scripture we can learn to better hear God's voice, learn about God's nature, character, will and ways. If we are grounded in routine Bible engagement with God and the Holy Spirit, we will be amazed how we begin to hear God's voice more often throughout our day.

*God Speaks: The Inner Voice (Spontaneous Thoughts and Impressions):*

Another main way God speaks to people is through an inner voice which is most often expressed by spontaneous thoughts we hear and impressions we have. Spontaneous

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<sup>15</sup> Wilhoit, *Discovering Lectio*, 567.



thoughts we hear and impressions we receive come to us, similar to how many times in the Bible we read “the word of the Lord came to me...” These are distinct from thoughts we think about on our own. For instance, it is distinct from that voice in our head that is constantly talking. You know it is that voice that said, “I don’t have a voice in my head?”

Dallas Willard, Christian Scholar and Author, in his book, *“Hearing God:*

*Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, believes:

Today I continue to believe that people are meant to live in an ongoing conversation with God, speaking and being spoken to. Rightly understood I believe that this can be abundantly verified in experience. God's visits to Adam and Eve in the Garden, Enoch's walks with God and the face-to-face conversations between Moses and Jehovah are all commonly regarded as highly exceptional moments in the religious history of humankind. Aside from their obviously unique historical role, however, they are not meant to be exceptional at all. Rather they are examples of the normal human life God intended for us: God's indwelling his people through personal presence and fellowship. Given who we are by basic nature, we live—really live—only through God's regular speaking in our souls and thus "by every word that comes from of the mouth of God:"<sup>16</sup>

I agree with Dallas Willard and Rob McCorkle whom I quoted earlier that hearing God’s voice brings life into our lives. Learning to discern God’s voice above all the other voices speaking to us is the challenging part. We need to intentionally take time to talk to and listen to God just as we would a good friend. One thing that may help us is knowing that God is always with us and around us and therefore God is always available for a conversation. The more we talk with God the more familiar we will become with the sound of God’s voice. This is similar to how I can easily discern the sound of my husband’s voice from a variety of male voices. I talk with my husband regularly and therefore immediately recognize his voice when he speaks to me. I hear him above others

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<sup>16</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing A Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2012), 20.

that may be speaking at the same time. The more we communicate with God the greater ease we will have recognizing God's voice.

After becoming a believer in 2004, God began to speak to me. I did not recognize God's voice, because I was not taught how to hear God, nor was I used to talking with God. The following year I kept having these thoughts about going to seminary. I really did not know why I was thinking that and regularly dismissed those thoughts for various reasons (I do not have time, the money, or a real desire, etc.). One Sunday about a year later I went to the altar to pray. I distinctly heard God say to me, "I've been talking to you about seminary for almost a year and you have done nothing." That was all I needed to hear. I clearly discerned God's voice in that moment and felt convicted in my Spirit to act. I immediately knew I needed to go and proceeded to take the necessary steps.

Fast forward several years. My husband and I were at a conference in Kentucky. We were heading to a breakout session we were going to attend. On the way over to that breakout session, I distinctly heard "Truth Therapy, Truth Therapy, Truth Therapy" three times in a row. I immediately knew it was God's voice and I needed to attend the breakout session called "Truth Therapy." It was at this session that God touched me in a powerful and life changing way. I was transformed that day by hearing God speak and by responding obediently to his call to go to that breakout session.

Mark and Patti Virkler, contemporary Christian co-authors who are founders and directors of Communion with God Ministries, have written over sixty books related to teaching people to hear God's voice and the Spirit anointed life. In their book, *Four Keys to Hearing God's Voice*, they came up with what they call four keys as follows:

Very simply stated, the four keys to hearing God's voice are: Stillness: Quiet yourself so you can hear God's voice. Vision: Look for vision as you pray.

Spontaneity: Recognize God's voice as spontaneous thoughts that light upon your mind. Journaling: Write down the flow of thoughts and pictures that light upon your mind.<sup>17</sup>

These four keys to hearing God were illuminated to Mark and Patti in a Scripture found in Habakkuk 2:1-3:

As exemplified in Habakkuk 2:1-3, there are four keys to hearing God's voice: I will stand on my guard post (be still). I will keep watch to see (fix your eyes on Jesus). He will speak to me (tune to spontaneity). Then the Lord answered me and said, "Record the vision." (Write the flow of thoughts and pictures that light upon your heart and mind.)<sup>18</sup>

Personally, practicing these four keys quickly made a believer out of me. This is also very easy to teach to others. Virkler, recommends that after recording the flow of spontaneous thoughts and pictures that come to mind, the next step is to review and discern if what was received was from God. He advises us to review our journaled conversation with God to first confirm that it is consistent with God's word, character, nature, will, etc. He additionally suggests: "We confirm God's voice and vision within us by asking three spiritual counselors to affirm that their hearts agree that this encounter came from God."<sup>19</sup> The more we practice hearing and recording our spontaneous thoughts and images that are consistent with God's character, nature, and will, the better we learn to recognize God speaking to us during our day as well. This practice is great training to tuning in to God's voice anytime and anywhere.

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<sup>17</sup> Mark and Patti Virkler, *Four Keys to Hearing God's Voice* (Shippensburg, PA, Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2010), 154.

<sup>18</sup> Virkler, *Four Keys*, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Virkler, *Four Keys*, 311.

*God Speaks: Spontaneous Pictures, Visions, and Dreams*

Just as God speaks to people with an inner voice by giving us spontaneous thoughts and impressions, God also speaks to us in spontaneous pictures, visions (while awake), and dreams (while asleep) that appear to us through our supernatural senses of hearing, seeing (we see in both the natural and supernatural), feeling, taste, etc. People receiving pictures, visions, and dreams are recorded all throughout the Bible. God uses our supernatural sight to communicate with us.

In October, 2017, my husband and I attended the Voice of the Apostles conference hosted by Global Awakening in Lancaster, PA. During worship at one of the sessions I felt something brushing up against the hairs on my arms every time I moved my right arm. In my spirit I supernaturally discerned that it was an angel next to me. I felt something brushing up against me, but I could not see what it was. After the worship was over, my husband told me he saw an angel standing behind me with his wings around me. What I supernaturally discerned, I also felt, and my husband saw with his supernatural sight.

Visions and dreams people had in the Bible were normal occurrences. Old Testament Scholar and Theologian Walter Brueggemann in his article, *Holy Intrusion: The Power of Dreams in the Bible*, acknowledges that God still speaks to us through dreams today. Brueggemann wrote: “There are many voices in the night, not all of them noble. Among them, however, is the voice of the holy God, who “plucks up and tears

down” what we have trusted, who “plants and build” what we cannot imagine.”<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that not all dreams are from God. Dreams are natural self-communication through our sub-conscious mind. We do recognize that some sub-conscious communication is from God via supernatural communication through our spiritual senses.

Pastor and theologian Jack Deere, in his book, *Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today Through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions*, wrote:

Did you know that the inventor of the modern sewing machine, Elias Howe, credited his invention to a dream? Or that Niels Bohr, a Nobel Prize winner, claimed he had seen the structure of the atom in a dream? [Robert Moss, “What Your Dreams Can Tell You,” *Parade* (Jan. 30, 1994): 13-14.] Modern readers might find this surprising, but it would have been rather normal in the ancient world. For example, the Philistine King Abimelech thought Sarah was only Abraham’s sister, so he took her for his wife. Then God came to Abimelech in a dream and said, “You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman” (Gen. 20:3). The amazing thing about this experience is that when the king awoke the next morning, he immediately called for Abraham and gave Sarah back—he instantly obeyed his dream. In Bible times, people knew God spoke frequently through dreams, so they took them seriously.<sup>21</sup>

Deere also notes that there are examples of dreams recorded throughout Scripture to both non-believers and believers and cites examples from both the Old and the New Testaments.<sup>22</sup> Deere goes on to write, “God may use a dream to warn, encourage, or guide us. He may visit us in a dream to commune with us or to reveal the future to us. Or he may use a dream to command us. He even uses dreams to speak to unbelievers.”<sup>23</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Holy Intrusion: The Power of Dreams in the Bible,” *Christian Century* 22, no. 13 (2005): 31. Accessed December 13, 2018. ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials EBSCOhost.

<sup>21</sup> Jack S. Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today Through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 217.

<sup>22</sup> Deere, *Surprised*, 217-219.

<sup>23</sup> Deere, *Surprised*, 219.

his book he gives several accounts of people today who give credible accounts to God speaking through pictures, dreams, and visions.

In Tom Doyle's book, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?*, he records several firsthand accounts of Muslims coming to know Jesus personally through dreams and/or visions. Tom has traveled throughout the Middle East capturing real life stories of Muslims who risk their lives, face persecution, and are coming to Christ through personal encounters with Jesus through dreams and/or visions.<sup>24</sup>

It certainly makes sense that God would communicate with people in these ways. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Personally, God speaks to me more frequently through pictures than dreams (I have not had a vision yet). I call them flash experiences. I see a quick flash and a picture is revealed to me for about a second. A picture is worth a thousand words.

The first time this had happened, I was at home walking up the stairs, and suddenly I saw this picture in my mind of my daughter (who gave me permission to share) and her friend sneaking out of the house later that night (she was having a sleepover). I told my husband what I saw, he did not believe me, and encouraged me to not worry as it was not going to happen. Well, later that day I forgot all about it until I woke up suddenly around 2 a.m. and remembered the image. I got out of bed and investigated and sure enough, they were gone. They were around twelve years old at the time. They were very surprised when I called them and they realized they were busted. The other thing that this communication from God "the vivid picture of them sneaking

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<sup>24</sup> Tom Doyle, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 9-12.

out of the house in my mind” provided was an opening to later have a faith conversation with my daughter about how God is real and was the one who provided the information to me.

*A Wesleyan Theological Framework for Hearing God’s Voice: Spiritual Sensory Perception Through Faith*

John Wesley, pastor, theologian, and revival leader of the Methodist movement taught that direct knowledge and revelation of God comes through spiritual sensory perception through faith. Wesley wrote, preached, and taught about the role of the spiritual senses in several of his sermons (Awake, Thou That Sleepest, The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God, The New Birth, etc.). It is only through spiritual perception that we can have inward assurance of faith through the witness of the spirit. For John Wesley, sensory perception through faith is how we know God. We know God through the awakening and activation of supernatural senses through faith.

Dr. Keith Haartman, is a psychoanalyst and a professor of religious studies at the University of Toronto. He wrote a book called, *Watching and Praying: Personality Transformation in Eighteenth Century British Methodism*. In Haartman’s book he builds a bridge between psychoanalytic concepts and John Wesley’s theological method for mass personality transformation in early Methodism. To that end, “...Haartman shows, with remarkable clarity, how psychoanalysis supplies the tools for understanding the process of religious beliefs.”<sup>25</sup> Haartman writes:

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<sup>25</sup> Keith Haartman, *Watching and Praying: Personality Transformation in Eighteenth Century British Methodism* (Amsterdam – New York, NY: Rodopi, 2004), vii.

...Wesley explains that justification opens up a new world in which one intuits the presence of God in and through all things. Believers who undergo a second birth receive an entirely distinct set of supernatural faculties. “Spiritual senses” supplement the sensory capabilities of the physical body by offering a view of the “eternal world,” “the invisible things of God”....”<sup>26</sup>

Randy Maddox, author, theologian, and Professor of Wesleyan Studies at Duke Divinity School, in his book, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, states that Wesley “agreed with empiricists that direct knowledge [of God] must come through the senses, he postulated (in conscious contrast with Locke and Browne) that God provided humans with *spiritual senses* to sense spiritual realities, just as our physical senses sense physical realities.”<sup>27</sup>

I agree with Wesley, that after we are born again through faith in Jesus Christ, we have supernatural senses that are awakened after we are born again. As new creatures we now have spiritual eyes that are able to see spiritual realities, spiritual ears that have opened that hear Jesus’ voice, spiritual sensitivity allowing us to physically feel God’s presence around, on, and in us, etc. Just as a newborn baby sees, hears, and feels for the first time when they are born, we begin to see, hear, and sense God through our spiritual senses. These spiritual senses are essential to hearing God’s voice who speaks to us through a variety of spiritual faculties. We must learn how to sense God so that we can better hear and communicate with God.

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<sup>26</sup> Haartman, *Watching and Praying*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 27.



## Conclusion

God desires to know, communicate with us, and to be in direct relationship with his people. For us to know God, God must first reveal God's self to us through both indirect and direct encounter. What revelation is and the most common means by which God reveals himself to us is the main theological theme for this chapter. We cannot know God without God revealing himself personally to us. We can learn about God indirectly through other people, the witness of creation, and reading Scripture for instance. Knowing God personally however, involves direct personal revelation, that is an encounter with God similar to how we get to personally know other people.

After we become born again Christians our supernatural senses are awakened. Knowing this is crucial to learning to hear and discern what God is saying to us. Just as a baby who is born in the world must use their physical sensory perception to know other people and to learn about the world, we must learn to know God and learn about this new world that has been opened up to us through faith. If we look at God as our spiritual parent God will teach us about this new world that has been opened to us through faith in Jesus. We can also rely on and receive help from our older brothers and sisters in Christ who have learned how to hear God's voice and who are learning to walk by their new found faith. Walking by faith means we both hear and respond to what we see God saying and doing.

God speaks to us through various means. Several of the most common ways we encounter God and hear his voice: Scripture, the inner voice (spontaneous thoughts and impressions), and through spontaneous pictures, visions, and dreams were covered. Each of these ways requires our spiritual senses to be opened through faith. These are certainly

not the only way God speaks, but learning these ways will help us to discern the many other ways God speaks and communicates to us. These various methods of hearing God's voice will be taught.

Practical exercises will be developed that will be designed to use and activate our spiritual senses so we can better hear what God is saying to us. We develop and grow in our communication and understanding of what God says to us through practice, experience, trial, and error; similar to how a child learns. For instance, when our parents tell us not to touch the stove because it is hot, we learn what "hot" means really quick if we touch the stove. Similarly, just as parents teach their child how to walk (by direct instruction, watching others, and encouraging them to get back up after they fall down, etc.) we learn how to live and walk by faith in the same way.

A core premise for this project is that learning the ways God speaks will result in participants more clearly hearing God's voice; the frequency that they hear God will increase; and they will identify new ways God speaks to them. It is anticipated participants will self-report at the end of this class that they feel equipped to continue to hear God's voice and that they are growing closer with Jesus because of their faithful obedience to what God said to them.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The interdisciplinary field selected for this project is linguistics and learning with a focus on sensory perception as it relates to communication and learning. Use of sensory perception is one of the main ways we communicate, learn, and understand one another. We use a variety of senses when we listen to what another person is saying to us (their choice of words, tone of voice, facial expressions, visual gestures, touch, etc.) all of which contribute to communication and understanding as we learn to communicate with one another and with God. We first must perceive God to know him through supernatural sensory perception that the born-again Christian experience has opened through faith in Jesus Christ. Learning to hear God's voice could be equated to learning how to speak and understand a second language.

The learning from this field and framework will enhance the effectiveness of teaching people to hear God's voice. Perceiving God's voice is necessary through supernatural senses. There are several journal articles that have covered research in the area of linguistics and sensory perception. Several of the topics researched from the interdisciplinary field will be used in this Doctor of Ministry project to help teach people to better hear God's voice. The main three that will be taught are listening (noticing) skills, journaling, and multi-sensory awareness of language inputs.

The research contained in this chapter is from the field of linguistics and learning with a focus on sensory perception shows three things that are helpful when teaching people to learn a second language: learning how to listen (noticing), journaling, and multisensory input. Each of these three things will also be helpful in teaching people to hear and understand God's voice. Additionally, each of these elements can be drawn out from the Biblical, Historical, and Theological Foundations chapters thereby enhancing our ability to dialogue and as a result potentially learn from one another.

I chose this field because sensory perception is very important when hearing God's voice and we must use our sensory perception when learning a new language. I assert that learning how to hear God's voice (the voice of a supernatural being) is similar to learning a new language. We essentially have to learn the language of God to communicate with God on a regular basis. This needs to be taught. It is not intuitive. I consider myself an intuitive person and my intuition did not teach me to hear God's voice, learning the language of God did.

### **Interdisciplinary Theory Key Learnings**

There is a lot of research on the topic of linguistics and language and the role of sensory perception that relates to communication and learning. Communication with one another requires that we use our sensory perception (sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell). Hearing God's voice requires sensory perception as well. Just as we use our sensory perception in communication by taking in verbal, visual, touch, etc. inputs, God communicates to us through a variety of supernatural senses. Inputs that have been opened through faith (seeing, hearing, touch, taste, impressions, thoughts, audible voice,

etc.). Taking a multisensory approach to teach people to hear what God is saying to them is essential in communicating with God because God often uses more than one sense at a time (visual, auditory, impressions, etc.).

I have identified three key things in the interdisciplinary field of linguistics and sensory perception that will be very helpful in teaching people to hear God's voice. The primary three features of sensory perception in linguistics that I will highlight in this chapter include the role of noticing inputs and outputs in communication when learning a second language (also called The Noticing Hypothesis), using listening journals to enhance learning with second languages, and the importance of learning how to utilize multisensory perception in language and communication to help more accurately understand one another.

Below is a description of each of the three key insights from this research. Following the brief description of each is a section on how they interact with the project theme and the biblical, historical, and theological foundations chapters for the project. The scientific model used to engage with these topics will be that of dialogue.

### *The Noticing Hypothesis*

Dr. Muhlise Cosgun Ogeyik, is a Professor at Trakya University in Edirne, Turkey. In her article, "The Comparative Effectiveness of Noticing in Language Learning," she conducted research based on The Noticing Hypothesis. Ogeyik writes "that input [input is the spoken or written language a learner is exposed to] does not become intake [intake is the input that was comprehended] during language learning

unless it is noticed.”<sup>1</sup> This certainly makes sense. Language outputs are spoken or written words using the second language by the student or instructor. The article asserts that for persons who are learning a second language that “noticing” language inputs and instructor outputs that are offered as corrective feedback enhances a person’s ability to more effectively comprehend and learn. To say this another way, the instructor outputs that are given are corrective feedback to the students that then become new inputs for the students during the student and teacher interaction. For instance, if the input and output is not “noticed” by the student intake (comprehension) will not occur.<sup>2</sup>

Ogeyik states “The results of the reviewed studies showed that noticing through output oriented tasks generates higher level of perception of L2 [second language] knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Most of the output oriented tasks are those that are derived through teacher and student environments. The study showed that teacher and student learning environments can intentionally boost “noticing” for learners and thereby increase comprehension in second language acquisition. The study also noted that peer to peer feedback did not lead to better results as peer to peer feedback was not able to effectively help students notice the “inputs.”<sup>4</sup> This was due to the fact that the students could not effectively teach each other a language they themselves were learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Muhlise Cosgun Ogeyik, “The Comparative Effectiveness of Noticing in Language Learning,” in *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 56, no. 4 (2018): 377.

<sup>2</sup> Ogeyik, “Noticing,” 393-394.

<sup>3</sup> Ogeyik, “Noticing,” 377

<sup>4</sup> Ogeyik, “Noticing,” 393-394, 397.

*The Use of Listening Journals:*

Researcher Cheryl Wei-yu Chen previously worked for the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at National Taipei University of Business in Taipei City, Taiwan. Chen's article, "Guided Listening with Listening Journals and Curated Materials: A Metacognitive Approach," sought to see the impact of using "listening journals" with students who were learning a second language. The results showed that "students were learning to plan for their listening, monitor their comprehension, solve comprehension problems, and evaluate their approach and outcome. Students generally recognized the benefits of keeping listening journals, but some felt the process was too time-consuming."<sup>5</sup>

Chen notes that when learning a second language listening is the most important skill to learn and often "...the most difficult skill to acquire in the learning process because the act of listening is often implicit and ephemeral (Graham 2003)."<sup>6</sup> Listening journals were based on a metacognitive approach that had the students plan, monitor, problem solve, and evaluate their listening. The journals documented the students' out of class listening exercises.<sup>7</sup> The results showed there was "much evidence for students' emerging metacognitive awareness to actively control and reflect on their private listening."<sup>8</sup>

The article concludes that:

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<sup>5</sup> Cheryl Wei-yu Chen, "Guided Listening with Listening Journals and Curated Materials: A Metacognitive Approach," in *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 13, no. 2: (2019), 133.

<sup>6</sup> Chen, "Listening Journals," 133.

<sup>7</sup> Chen, "Listening Journals," 134.

<sup>8</sup> Chen, "Listening Journals," 138.

Despite its importance, learning to listen in a second language poses many challenges to learners, and how to teach listening effectively is of paramount importance. With the assistance of listening journals, the participants in this study were beginning their journeys of becoming self-regulated learners who were in the process of learning how to take better control of their listening processes. Through the journals, they learned to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening activities.<sup>9</sup>

Although there are distinct differences between a person learning a new language and learning to hear God's voice there are certainly overlaps in teaching concepts that are helpful. As the results of this study noted in the above quote, teaching people to listen effectively will be of paramount importance in learning to hear God's voice.

*Multisensory Awareness in Learning and Communication:*

Casey O'Callaghan is a Professor of Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis. O'Callaghan specializes in mind, perception, and metaphysics. In O'Callaghan's article, "Grades of Multisensory Awareness," he writes:

...one of the most fascinating lessons to emerge from recent psychophysics and neuroscience is that different sensory systems interact and influence each other. Recognizing and exploring this has spurred dramatic development in the cognitive sciences of perception during the past two decades. What we have learned is that perceiving does not just involve visual, auditory, tactual [sense of touch], olfactory [sense of smell], and gustatory [sense of taste] systems working in parallel and in isolation. It involves extensive cooperation and coordination among the senses. So, theorizing about individual modalities and treating them as explanatorily independent risks failing to appreciate the ways in which perceiving with one sense depends upon and affect how we perceive with the others.<sup>10</sup>

In O'Callaghan's article he explains six grades of multisensory awareness. It is not important that we understand each grade for the purposes of this chapter. I will cover

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<sup>9</sup> Chen, "Listening Journals," 141.

<sup>10</sup> Casey O'Callaghan, "Grades of Multisensory Awareness," in *Mind & Language*, 32 no. 2 (2017): 156. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/mila.12137>.



a couple of the multisensory grades to clearly distinguish how it is essential in our communication with other people and more clearly hearing God's voice.

The first grade is Minimally Multisensory Awareness (MMA). MMA asserts that the five basic senses mentioned above are co-consciously perceived at the same time.

O'Callaghan comments,

People see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. They do so at the same time, and they do so co-consciously. So perceptual awareness is at least minimally multisensory. By this I mean that it is possible for a subject to undergo episodes of co-conscious perceptual awareness associated with more than one exteroceptive sensory modality at a time.<sup>11</sup>

The basic gist of this is that we can take in more than one sense at the same time. We can see and simultaneously smell cookies that have just been taken out of the oven at the same time.

The second grade is called Coordinated Multisensory Awareness (CMA).

O'Callaghan states that:

Cross-modal perceptual illusions challenge the explanatory independence of the senses. These are cases in which stimulation to one sensory system impacts and reshapes experience associated with another in a way that leads to misperception. Familiar examples include: ventriloquism, an auditory spatial illusion produced by vision; the McGurk effect<sup>[12]</sup>, in which vision impacts speech perception; the rubber hand illusion<sup>[13]</sup>, involving visual capture of proprioceptive location [stimuli that is produced and perceived]; the sound induced-flash effect of audition on vision; and the parchment skin illusion, an auditory influence on touch.

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<sup>11</sup> O'Callaghan, "Grades," 156.

<sup>12</sup> For a demonstration of the McGurk Effect visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-IN8vWm3m0>. In this video the McGurk effect is demonstrated by a person making the sound "Ba." When we see and hear someone saying "Ba" both our sight and hearing perceive correctly. However, when we see someone saying "Fa" but actually hear "Ba" our sight takes over and distorts our hearing so that we hear "Fa" instead of "Ba" which is actually communicated.

<sup>13</sup> For a demonstration of the Rubber Hand Illusion visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxwn1w7MJvk>.

Just as visual illusions teach us about visual processing and the organization of visual perception, crossmodal illusions illuminate multisensory processes and the organization of multisensory perception. Unlike cross-sensory synesthesia, these effects are widespread, and they result from principled perceptual strategies that are intelligible as adaptive and as epistemically advantageous (see O’Callaghan, 2012). The leading hypothesis is that they improve accuracy and enhance the overall reliability of perception.<sup>14</sup>

What this research shows is that the senses work together with one another. They are not independent of one another. This is important for learning in that we take in sensory input and make conclusions on the input based on our cross-modal multisensory awareness.

As I mentioned above, understanding and reviewing each of the six grades of multisensory awareness are not needed for this analysis. The main point is that multisensory perception awareness is important to learning, communicating and understanding one another. Communication is not unisensory, other senses are involved when we converse with another person. Two people can say the same words and yet communicate completely different messages just by altering their tone, inflection or facial expressions. Sensory perception is not one modality at a time. We take communication and language inputs through multiple senses at a time.

### **Engaging the Project Theme with Key Learnings:**

#### *The Noticing Hypothesis:*

Regarding the overall project theme that teaching people to hear God’s voice will lead to spiritual vitality, instructing people to notice language inputs in communication and instructor outputs that become inputs for students according to Ogeyik’s research will

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<sup>14</sup> O’Callaghan, “Grades,” 157-158.

be essential in teaching people to hear God's voice. Teaching students to notice communication inputs from God will be important. Some examples of communication inputs from God are things highlighted from previous chapters. Things like noticing a piece of Scripture that is highlighted to us, to spontaneous thoughts, pictures, or images we have, to even physical sensations like tingling, heat, and more. God speaks in a multitude of ways. When I first became a Christian, I did not know God was speaking to me because I was not taught how to notice the various inputs of God's voice.

For example, as I shared in a previous chapter, I did not initially know God spoke to people through their thought life. I was not taught to notice that some of my thoughts were God speaking to me. As a result, I missed a lot of communication inputs, "spontaneous thoughts" from God, because I did not "notice" them. I previously believed all my thoughts were my own and thereby made decisions based on my own thinking. I would choose which thoughts to act on and which ones not to act on or others to ignore completely. Learning how to "notice" which thoughts are from God, which thoughts were my own, and which thoughts are from the devil is important. Although there are gray areas in distinguishing who the thoughts are coming from, there are some good guidelines we can teach that will be helpful in knowing if something is from God, us, or the devil. Teaching the essentials of these differences will help students learn faster how to have more confidence that they are hearing from God.

Noticing thoughts is just the beginning of learning to hear God's voice. Some of the more expansive ways God communicates with us is through pictures, dreams, the Scripture, etc. that God reveals to us. Again, we must notice them as an "input" from God. Many of us have heard the saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." God

frequently can say more to us by showing us one picture than by giving us several thoughts. Noticing God's communication sensory inputs through various means is the beginning to hearing and discerning God's voice for our lives.

In the past two years while at conferences and other places where the presence of God has been tangibly felt by many, I have noticed heat on me (the fire of God) in various intensities. More and more I notice the fire of God on me during my week at some point or another. For me, it is a physical touch from God reminding me that God is with me. During these times I become keenly aware of God's presence which encourages my spirit and soul.

*The Use of Listening Journals:*

The concept and use of listening journals could be beneficial in teaching people to hear God's voice. The intent of the listening journals is to capture and record what we believe we hear God saying during the week and for use of intentional listening exercises at various times. Participants will have a place in the journal to self-evaluate what they heard and later receive feedback from other students during the next class. Although Chen's research mentioned that "some students" found journaling time consuming, I believe they will be beneficial in capturing listening data and will keep this in mind when designing them. Journals are such a great way to keep a record of not only what God has said but can be used to encourage participants later if they review them weeks, months, or years later.

I agree with Chen that teaching people to become better listeners is essential. Listening for God's voice will be and is crucial for the success of the project. In addition

to doing that we also have to metaphorically teach people what God's voice sounds like. There is a sound to God's voice that brings peace to our spirits and conviction in our souls and belief in our hearts. The sound of God's voice encourages, changes, and transforms us the more we hear it. The sound of God's voice is greater than the words or images and impressions from God that we receive.

*Multisensory Awareness in Learning and Communication:*

The insight of multisensory awareness in learning and communication with one another is crucial to teaching people how to learn to hear God's voice. Just as we receive multisensory communication from one another every day, we also receive multisensory communication with God. God speaks to us through our supernatural senses that were activated through faith. Teaching people to use their spiritual multisensory perception awareness will help to enhance hearing God's voice more accurately beyond being attentive to one supernatural sense at a time.

For instance, when we hear, see, feel, smell, taste, or discern a word from God we must evaluate quickly if it actually was from God. This is where our multisensory perception will come in handy. We can ask ourselves; do we have the peace of Christ about that which we heard? If our internal response to what we heard invokes fear, anxiety, doubt, and worry it most likely was not from God. Does this word align with God's word? The more time we spend reading Scripture (the whole Bible), we begin to know what God's voice sounds like through the multitude of times God has spoken in the past. There is a consistency to God's voice. The more we know what God said already through the Bible, the more our ability to know if what we heard aligns with God's word,

character, nature, will, etc. as it has already been revealed through Scripture. We can ask questions, like, how do we discern the meaning of the picture God showed us, what we saw with our eyes, into what God was saying in our heart?

*Integration of Key Learnings for The Project Theme:*

The integration of the above three key learnings will be incorporated into the class and in the homework between classes. The development of a daily journal sheet that has specific prompts for noticing communication inputs from God, what type of input it was (picture, impression, thought, revelation through reading Scripture, dream, etc.), journaling space to record things the students hear during the day, and space to record intentional listening time each day. The journal will have a place to check off and list the various senses (multisensory awareness) that they were aware of when they discerned and heard God's voice. The final item on the journal will track how they responded to what God said and how it impacted their spiritual vitality. I am anticipating that this will accelerate the student's ability to hear God's voice in and throughout their day and to respond by being obedient to what they heard.

**Engaging Biblical Foundations with Key Learnings:**

Initial thoughts on engaging the Biblical Foundations have to do with the Noticing Hypothesis. In the Biblical Foundations chapter, the Old Testament passage was from Exodus 33:12-17. It occurred to me that if Moses had not originally noticed the burning bush in Exodus 3, he might not have been used by God to deliver the people from Pharaoh in the first place. Being aware of and noticing the things that God highlights

around us is central to hearing God's voice. If Moses had been distracted and hurried to take the sheep to another location, he may have missed the burning bush altogether.

Noticing God's language inputs is key to hearing his voice.

Specifically, in the Exodus 33 passage Moses is in the "tent of meeting," the place where God's presence dwelled. After we become believers in Jesus Christ, we could metaphorically say we carry the "tent of meeting" everywhere we go. Taking time for us to notice God's presence with us we theoretically can notice what God is saying and doing at any time. The key is noticing. Teaching people that they have the ability to access God's presence and therefore God's voice continuously throughout their day could transform many lives. The project therefore may benefit from having students pick three times a day to intentionally notice, listen for God's voice, and record what they heard in their journal. Later during the day, they can evaluate what they wrote, and record if they believe they heard or did not hear correctly and why.

In that same vein, teaching people how to quiet themselves to prepare to hear God's voice will be key to noticing what God is saying. So many people in this busy world rush from one place to another or are consumed with anxious worrisome thoughts that God's voice cannot be heard and "noticed" above all the other chatter in our heads and the world around us. Teaching students to take a couple of deep breaths and relax can help to position themselves to hear God. This will be important for the project especially for assignments during the week.

In the Biblical Foundations chapter, I raised the question of what would have happened if Moses had become impatient as he waited before God's presence and left before God asked him to come into his presence? Essentially, he could have missed the

instructions for the sanctuary and all its furnishings. Teaching people to wait before the Lord will be key to teaching them to listen to and “notice” God’s voice.

In the New Testament passage from the Biblical Foundations chapter, multisensory awareness will be helpful in discerning God’s voice. We typically hear many voices throughout the day (God’s, our own, parents, co-workers, media, etc.). Jesus said his sheep hear his voice. As I noted in the Biblical Foundations chapter, the sheep’s relationship with the Shepherd is so close that they recognize when a stranger is speaking and will not listen to the stranger’s voice. In fact, they will run away from the stranger’s voice because they do not recognize it. Multisensory awareness is needed to sort out God’s voice from all the others speaking to us.

God’s voice has a particular sound and feel to it. Similar to how a person would be able to distinguish their spouse’s voice distinctly from another man or woman’s voice, we could also discern our spouse’s handwriting from another person’s. We could take this analogy one more step and assert that even if we received two typed notes, one from someone we talk frequently with and another from a different person, we would be able to tell which one our friend wrote based on the choice of words used and the tone of the note. Multisensory awareness would help us to identify which written note was from our close friend.

### **Engaging Historical Foundations with Key Learnings**

The use of listening journals immediately comes to mind while engaging with the Historical Foundations research. Although there is not a one to one translation on the purpose of listening journals to journaling and recording what we hear God speaking in



our lives, there is certainly overlap. The historical foundations research, looked at the lives of three Saints, Saint Perpetua, Saint Patrick, and Saint Francis who recorded what they heard God saying. Their stories were either from their personal journals and written account of what happened (Saint Perpetua and Saint Patrick) or as in the case of Saint Francis a combination of both his own writing and the recorded testimony from others who knew his personal story. We would not have their stories if they did not record them.

One of the primary purposes of the listening journals when learning a second language was to “plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening activities.” We can find the building blocks of these in the writing and stories of each historical figure. For instance, in Perpetua’s journal she recorded a vision that both she and her brother, along with the Spirit, together discerned and came to agreement on the meaning of the vision. This particular vision came as a direct response to a question Perpetua was asked by her brother. Perpetua recorded the answer to the question the Lord gave her through a vision. Both Perpetua and her brother evaluated it together. It was also good to see how in Francis’s writing that he misinterpreted the meaning of a communication from the Lord and how the Lord corrected his evaluation and interpretation of the events. This is a good example of why taking time to evaluate what we hear is important.

Using the concept of listening journals can be a great tool to capture and process what is being heard, learned, said, etc. It also creates a fresh account and a record of the details as they occur versus trying to remember and document them later. Some communications from God come quickly and if not recorded immediately or shortly thereafter can be lost.

### **Engaging Theological Foundations with Key Learnings:**

The three key interdisciplinary learnings interact well with the Theological Foundations Chapter of the research. One thing that particularly struck me was the Theological Foundations chapter defines the term “revelation” to be God’s own self-disclosure to people. God’s self-disclosure is attested by Christians throughout time. I would assert that revelation, hearing God’s voice, requires multisensory perception. For instance, the word of God is the living word. People who believe by faith are able to receive supernatural revelation from the Holy Spirit as they read the word of God with their natural senses. I would assert this is received through multisensory perception. It is a combination of our natural senses and supernatural sensory perception together.

For instance, when a believer reads or hears the words in the Bible, the words become revelation with the help of the Holy Spirit, that is, when the natural words become living words. Living words from God have depth; they have a way of going into us. They have power to positively and immediately transform our attitude, thinking, disposition, and more at the same time for the better. From this standpoint they are by default multisensory.

For example, in the Theological Foundations chapter I mentioned an experience at a conference where I felt something brushing up against me and I discerned this was an angel in my spirit. Even though I could not see it, I discerned it supernaturally. My husband then confirmed that he saw what I felt without me mentioning anything to him. In this instance, this was multisensory perception at work.

This would make sense since the kingdom of God is transcendent and is therefore not limited by space and time. Multisensory spiritual perception allows us to discern

much more and on multiple levels than is possible in the natural. This reminds me of a time when my husband and I were having some marital problems our first year as new believers. I had been upset at him and was unable to find forgiveness in my heart. One afternoon, while wrestling with God over this concern, I walked into our living room and supernaturally felt and saw a beam of God's love and light go right through me. In a moment my heart was healed and I had love and forgiveness for my husband in my heart. What could have taken months or more of counseling was healed in a moment. This is another example of multisensory communication with God. In this encounter, God did not speak to me with words but through his love for me and my husband. It is not the intent of this project to explore the depth of multisensory communications from God, but instead to assert and hypothesize that all communication from God is multisensory.

The other two key learnings, noticing and listening journals are certainly foundational skills to hearing God's voice as noted in the other sections of this chapter. Both will be used in the project. From a theological perspective, these support the research already done. The listening journals also share a lot of commonalities from Mark and Patti Virkler's teaching on making intentional time to sit in God's presence and listen and record God's voice to speaking through spontaneous thoughts. As noted in that chapter evaluating what we have heard with a couple of spiritual advisors was suggested. We also want to remember to evaluate what we hear from God to make sure it is aligned with God's character, nature, will, etc.

## Conclusion

In summary, the three key learnings from the field of linguistics and learning will be helpful to teaching people to hear and discern God's voice in their lives. This research has helped me gain new insight into the importance of teaching people to listen for God's voice. Learning to quiet our minds and listen for that still small voice will be crucial in helping students to hear God. Helping them notice "God's inputs" which will require students to slow down from this fast-paced world. Jesus is ultimately our model as he remained in constant contact with God while on earth. Noticing and hearing God's voice will require teaching students to be listening with their supernatural senses. When preparing the class materials including specifics on how to help boost noticing God throughout the students' day will be helpful.

Listening journals will be important, even though they may seem time consuming to some as Chen noted in her research, especially those who are not used to journaling. It will be important to cover the benefits of this practice and to encourage the participants on practical ways to keep it simple. Options on how to do this easily might include taking advantage of electronic tools to record things quickly. For me personally, I always have to remember that the way I hear God, may not be the way someone else does. I do however, want to encourage students to experiment by hearing God multiple ways using multiple senses. In the end, we will rest in the promise that Jesus' sheep hear his voice.

Multisensory awareness is a new and growing edge for me. God is certainly not one dimensional. Teaching students to be aware of multiple senses at a time may help them discern God's voice from the other voices speaking to us. To hear God, we will have to sense beyond the natural world. The Bible tells us that Jesus only did and said

what Jesus saw and heard the Father doing. Teaching people to have their spiritual ears listening for God's voice throughout the day and pausing to record what they hear will help students gain confidence that they are hearing correctly.

Finally, recording how students respond to what they hear will be essential to the project results. The hypothesis and intention of this project is if members of the congregation are trained to better hear and discern God's voice the self-reported spiritual aliveness and vitality of the participants will increase. As a result, they will be encouraged to step out in faith and be obedient to what they are hearing God saying. As the students become more confident that they are hearing God, they will then be more likely to respond appropriately to what God said and their spiritual vitality will increase as a result.

## **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

My passion for my ministry has always been fueled by watching people grow in their relationship with God, from those who are exploring who God is, to the fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, and everyone in-between. Nothing brings me more joy than witnessing others being saved, healed, delivered, and set free to be the people God created them to be. A key feature of a growing relationship with God is being able to more clearly hear God's voice and to respond to what God is speaking into our lives. The hypothesis and intention of this project work from the beginning have been if members of the congregation are trained to better hear and discern God's voice, the self-reported spiritual aliveness and vitality of the participants will increase. As a result, they will be encouraged to step out in faith and be obedient to what they are hearing God say.

An underlying assertion with this is that sadly, many Christians have never actually been taught to hear God's voice. This assertion was validated for the group of twenty participants who showed up for the first class as indicated in their preliminary survey responses. One of the questions on the preliminary survey was "Have you previously been taught how to hear God's voice?" Seventy-five percent reported they had never been taught how to hear God's voice. Of the 25% of those who answered yes, only two of them had taken a class previously. The other three had no formal training. The

reader will see that as a result of this class, participants have learned how to better hear God's voice and are stepping out in faith and better listening to what God has told them.

Each chapter has provided important learnings that have shaped the design of the overall project in teaching people to hear and respond to God's voice. Each chapter has key elements that have undergirded and supported the project outcomes. These key elements, combined with the presence of the Holy Spirit, have helped participants to better hear God's voice and have increased their overall spiritual vitality as they live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

The exploration of two key passages from Exodus 33:12-17 and John 10:1-6 provided the biblical foundations for the project. Both passages contributed to key ideas and concepts that were used during the six-week class on teaching people to better hear God's voice. They provided the biblical foundations of God's deep desire to communicate, know, and be in an intimate personal relationship with humanity. God wants to live in us and among us. God invites us daily to abide and communicate with him throughout our day. It is my belief that our spiritual vitality is directly related to our awareness of God's abiding presence and voice speaking to us.

Hearing God's voice changes and transforms not only us but those around us as well. We need to remember that hearing God's voice is active, meaning that those who hear are called to also respond to what God said to them. Hearing God's voice is following where he leads and obeying what was said. As Dr. Rob McCorkle says, "Life is in the voice."<sup>1</sup> Both passages exemplify this point.

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<sup>1</sup> Rob McCorkle, *Bridging the Great Divide: Reuniting Word and Spirit* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2015), 279, Kindle.

The concepts of waiting and listening for God's voice were also drawn out in the class. Moses is a great model. He learned to wait before the Lord to hear what God wanted to say. For example, once Moses waited six days before the Lord before God called him into his presence. Moses also had a designated place in the Tent of Meeting where he would go frequently to talk to God. In the New Testament passage, this is shown by the beautiful picture of the sheep grazing and at the sound of the shepherd's voice, they respond. They are doing their thing "grazing" and when their shepherd speaks, they listen and respond. They will not listen to another's voice (including other shepherds). This was key to the project. Teaching people to discern the difference between God's voice, our own, and the devil's voice is an important distinction to know. Just as sheep can learn the distinct voice of their shepherd, we as God's children have to learn the distinct sound of God's voice in our lives.

God knows each of us by name and therefore wants to speak to us face-to-face. The face-to-face relationship is possible when we believe and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. The specific voice of God is where we get our daily encouragement, guidance, and marching orders. Jesus leads us out each day and tells us what he wants us to do and say to others. As we follow his voice and promptings, we get to live out and become the people God first thought of us to be. We get to discover our destiny as the children of God and the role God wants us to play as the kingdom of God is ushered in here on earth.

In the classes, we briefly touched on and explored how three historical saints of the church heard God's voice very differently in history. The sharing of some of their real-life testimony of how they heard God speak was helpful during the class sessions. We discussed how God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. God continues to



speak to his people in a variety of forms, from the audible voice of God, the inner voice (spontaneous thoughts and pictures), visions, Scripture, words of knowledge, through other people, physical manifestations, etc. Testifying to how God has spoken to other people in the past (the saints, and our own testimonies) helped participants recognize God's voice in the present. For me, some of my best examples of how to hear God's voice happened through recognizing after the fact that it was God who indeed did speak. Hearing how others heard God in the past helped draw out examples from participants' lives as well from the past. A consistent comment from the post-interviews was how the testimonies during the class sessions of how other people heard God speak during the week were instrumental in other participants learning how to hear God's voice.

The Theological Foundations chapter explored what revelation is from a theological perspective and the various main ways God reveals God's self to people and communities. Revelation from God is more than indirectly learning about God through other people, creation, and reading Scripture for instance. The revelation of God happens through a direct personal encounter with the living God where God makes himself known to us via many means and ways.

God commonly revealed himself to participants in a variety of ways: Scripture, the inner voice (spontaneous thoughts and impressions), and through spontaneous pictures, visions, and dreams. These along with others are some of the main ways God speaks that were taught during the project. There are certainly other ways God speaks, but teaching participants to learn these primary ways will help them to discern God's voice more clearly through other means.

As John Wesley taught and believed, for us to hear God, our supernatural senses must be awakened through faith. We then look to God as our spiritual parent who will teach us about the kingdom of God that is opening up to us through faith. Walking by faith means listening for God through the day and responding to what we hear and see God saying and doing. Using John Wesley's thoughts were very helpful. Participants really related to our having spiritual senses that become awakened after the new birth. Participants were able to translate learning to hear God's voice to a child who is learning to hear and understand the many ways parents speak to their children. Parents speak through facial expressions, tones of voice, through a hug or a kiss on the cheek, and more. Similarly, God speaks to his kids in a variety of means and senses as well.

Practical exercises were developed for each session. These included exercises on the use of the ancient practice called *lectio divina* that helps people become aware of God's presence in our midst, journaling, and other ways to encounter God and his voice speaking to us. These practical exercises helped to activate participants' spiritual senses so that they can hear and see what God is saying and doing in their lives. Each exercise ended with a time of sharing how they heard or did not hear God's voice. Discussion about what helped them hear and what may have been in the way of their hearing was also highlighted. Since taking the class the majority of the participants feel better equipped to hear God's voice.

The interdisciplinary research in the field of language and linguistics as it relates to communication and the role that sensory perception has in learning a second language was insightful and helpful. This research confirmed, affirmed, and is consistent with

various thoughts in the biblical, historical, and theological foundations that were built. From that standpoint, we can be dialogue partners and can learn from each other.

The three main things that were useful in the Doctor of Ministry project were:

1. The noticing hypothesis (language inputs do not become outputs unless they are noticed by the people). God's voice goes forth every day. It only becomes a communication from God when it is noticed. This begs the question, how many communication inputs do we miss from God because we are preoccupied with electronics, worry, or are busy and go from thing to thing without taking time to "smell the roses," so to speak? Teaching people to notice God's voice throughout the day has been important for the success of this project.
2. The use of listening journals to record what we believe God is saying was extremely valuable for participants who embraced this practice. Listening journals allowed participants to write down what they thought they were hearing and sensing from God and also allowed them to self-assess if it was from God or not. They next self-assessed using a checkbox on the journal log where they indicated their lack or level of confidence if something was from God. They chose from the following options: Not sure it was God, Might have been God, Pretty sure it was God, Very Certain (see appendix E for a sample of the listening journal). The listening journals also had a place for each participant to record how they responded to what God said.
3. Multisensory awareness was also crucial in hearing God's voice. Multisensory awareness helps us tune into our sensory perception as we take in the things around us that we hear, feel, see, taste, smell, and discern. Knowing if something is from God requires more than one sense. God's voice has a particular sound and feel to it. It is

not just words on a page, a thought in our mind, a picture we see, etc. It is more than that. God's word brings life, conviction, awakening, and transformation into our lives. Multisensory awareness helped participants better discern Jesus' voice among all the others speaking to them.

Each of the previous chapters offered something unique to the quest of learning how to hear God's voice and/or in the discernment process after we have heard (how we respond to what God said). It was also stressed throughout the class that hearing God's voice requires a response. The response could be something as simple as saying "thank you, God," to receiving the word within our spirit and allowing it to come to life through us, to being obedient by saying and doing what we saw or heard God say. It is always good that we share what we hear God saying to us with another person or two, who can be spiritual counselors, and give us feedback and affirmation if something sounds like it is from God or not.

The bottom line is God wants to talk with us every day from the smallest thing to the bigger things that weigh on our hearts and everything in between. We were created to be in daily communion and communication with God in everything we say and do. God's plan is unfolding, the kingdom of God is advancing, and God wants us to be active participants. For us to do that we have to become better listeners who hear and respond to God's voice. Have you heard God speak to you through these chapters?

### **Methodology**

The overall project methodology was to offer a six-week class to teach people how to hear God's voice. The class structure was important. It provided an opportunity to

combine opening icebreakers, teaching, group discussion, sharing partners, testimony, and practical in-class exercises. The in-class exercises were designed to activate participants' spiritual senses and thereby hear more clearly what God was saying to them in the moment and to the overall class. After each class, homework was assigned for the following week that intentionally incorporated the learning from each class and gave them opportunities to practice what was learned. Each element of the class was essential.

On the first night of the class, each participant completed the preliminary survey. The preliminary survey used with permission was from Madeline Henners' doctoral work at United Theological Seminary from May 2019. Her project was titled “*A Guided Plan Designed to Deepen One’s Intimacy with God*.” The purpose of her study was “to test the effectiveness of a guided plan for increasing one’s ability to hear God’s voice and feel a deeper connection with God.”<sup>2</sup> Very minor modifications were made to the survey (some questions were modified, age categories were changed, etc.).

The purpose of the survey was to gather background data on the participants and to determine how well they currently heard God speaking into their lives before taking the class. The survey also sought to determine if the participants had heard God speak to them in the past, along with the various ways they had previously heard God speak and the frequency of those communications. Another key feature of the survey that was important was it measured their current level of engagement in various spiritual practices (Bible reading, prayer, fasting, etc.) and the frequency of those. This information could impact how well or not someone currently hears and discerns God’s voice in their lives. It

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<sup>2</sup> Madeline Henners, “*A Guided Plan Designed to Deepen One’s Intimacy with God*” (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2019), 1.

also measured how they have sensed God physically in the past (which is another way God speaks to his people). In the Theological Foundations chapter, it was mentioned how parents communicate to their children without words through physical touch like a hug or tug (when in danger).

A similar but different post-survey was administered on the last night of the class to measure any changes after the class and to help identify key factors that helped or did not help participants to better hear God's voice. The post-survey was designed to measure several things including the impact they saw this class having on their engagement in spiritual disciplines and church engagement, and a self-assessment of the impact of learning to hear God's voice had on their relationship with God and any changes to their personal spiritual vitality. Responses included: Remained the same, Increased a little, Increased, and Significantly increased. Eighty-seven percent of participants reported an increased spiritual vitality as a result of learning how to better hear God's voice.

The opening icebreaker each week was designed to have participants share how they previously heard God speaking or prompting them to do something. Sharing partners, table discussion groups, and large group sharing times were designed to give everyone a chance to share. Sharing partners allowed everyone to share in a one-on-one setting. This was intentionally set up so that people who were more introverted or shy to share with someone in a less threatening environment. My personal belief is that everyone has heard God's voice at some and many points in their lives even if they did not recognize it at the time. This sharing time allowed participants to share in a non-threatening environment. It also allowed everyone to share with someone. The only caveat was that husbands and wives were not to share with each other. Sharing partners

were also used during hearing God activation exercises to allow people to practice hearing God in the moment with one other person.

After the opening icebreaker each week, which was always related to how participants heard God the previous week, the class concluded with sharing in a large group setting so that those attending could hear how others heard God or were struggling to hear God's voice in their lives. This allowed them to learn from each other's personal testimonies, questions, and struggles. This time also provided space for the class to encourage each other.

The class was intentionally set up to have teaching time each week. This was foundational as the assumption was that most people at church have not formally been taught to hear God's voice and for those who may have had some previous training this would be a refresher course or a time for them to learn more deeply. This was also a time to learn from the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations that undergirded this project as well.

At the end of each class, we had a time of practical application where the class could immediately practice what they just learned. This time was important for them to begin to learn how to hear God's voice. This class was not just teaching and theory. Immediate practical application was intentional. Similar to attempting to learn how to ride a bike by reading a manual or being taught in a class, learning theory alone does not work. To be successful in learning how to ride a bike, you must get on the bike and attempt to ride. Someone who is learning how to ride a bike cannot just learn balance from teaching and talking about it. Balance is only something you learn how to do after you get on the bike. The great thing about this example is that once a person learns

balance, they do not need to be taught again. Hearing God is similar. Once you learn to tune your attention to hearing God's voice through practice, it will always stick with you.

Homework was also given each week to reinforce what we learned and practiced in class. The homework was designed to have them grow in hearing, sensing, and responding to God's voice during the week. One of the weekly homework assignments given was to complete five daily hearing God journaling logs each week (see Appendix E). The journal was designed to capture the various ways they noticed, heard, or experienced God speaking to them each day.

The journals included a simple checkbox of the ways God spoke to them in a given day so they could easily record how they heard God speak to them that day. There were also journal prompts for each day where they could record what they heard or sensed God saying to them. For each journal prompt, they could then self-assess how certain or not certain they were that God spoke. The self-assessment included the following choices: Not sure if it was God, Might have been God, Pretty sure it was God, and Very certain it was God. The journal also provided an opportunity to record how they responded and/or obeyed what God said. This is important as hearing God is more than just hearing. They were to turn in their journals at the end of each week so that I could see how God was speaking or not, note where they were struggling, and what topics that would need to be stressed as the class continued.

In addition to the daily journal logs, other homework was given that was relevant to the current week's learning or other assignments based on class discussion. Some examples of these exercises ranged from engaging with Scripture during the week, stepping out in faith and sharing words from God that encourage, strengthen, and comfort



others, watch a video, etc. Other homework assignments encouraged them to go deeper into other spiritual disciplines that help people hear God's voice more clearly (rewriting a Psalm in their own words, fasting, and extended times of worship during their week, and sitting in silence as they listened for God's voice).

Each class after the first week also had a section for "Going Deeper." This section was crucial in the learning process. It was an opportunity to cover things that needed to be reviewed, reinforced by going deeper into the concepts learned previously. It also provided an opportunity for class discussion and to answer questions where folks were struggling. This section was important and was used to fill in the learning gaps. During the opening of each class, participants had an opportunity to share how God spoke during the week and through the homework assignments.

At the end of the six-week course, post-interviews were scheduled with those who completed the class. The post-interview focused on a few key questions. What was the best thing and what was the hardest thing about the class? Participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten (one meaning they have never heard God's voice before and ten meaning they hear God clearly all the time). They were asked to self-assess at the start and end of the class. They were additionally asked what was the contributing factor in moving from one point to another. For example, if they rated themselves a "two" at the beginning of the class and a "six" at the end of the class, they were additionally asked what helped them go from a "two" to a "six?" This question was designed to help me know what they attributed as the main factor to their hearing God more clearly. The final interview questions were directed at how they were hearing God

since the class completed, what worked and did not work about the class, and how the class can be improved in the future.

### **Implementation**

The Hearing God class initially started four weeks later than anticipated on Wednesday, Feb 5, 2020. The later start was necessary because the project had not received approval by Human Subject Review until January 13 (due to my not starting the process sooner). Two and a half weeks before the class beginning, the class advertisement flier was placed in the church bulletin on January 19 and the same information on the flier was also sent via email on January 22. Seventeen people signed up for the class and were emailed the consent form to read and sign. One person dropped out after reading the consent form and another person wanted clarification regarding the consent form, confidentiality of information, and class expectations (this person remained in the class).

While prayerfully preparing for the first class, the initial class according to the project plan was to cover the biblical and historical foundations of hearing God's voice. After reviewing the six weeks of teaching, it made more sense to change the focus of week one to an introduction of the basics of hearing God's voice for the class. This was critical to getting everyone off to a good start given the class was only six weeks. The biblical and historical foundations were inserted little by little each week instead. This change of focus resulted in sharing one of the biblical foundation texts (John 10:2-5) on the first night along with an introduction of The Noticing Hypothesis from the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter which was important in week one.

The first night while arriving, people who had not signed up were showing up for the class. Preparation was made before the first night for five extra people and five extra folks came for the first class. Of the original people who signed up, there was one no-show. The class began with twenty people and ended with seventeen; three people dropped out during class. One person realized they were taking on too much and two others had scheduling conflicts with things that came up after the class started.

The first class began with reading the consent form aloud to make sure everyone understood while allowing for questions, making it clear their participation in this project is completely voluntary, and that they can drop out at any time. Following the signing of the consent forms, each participant was given a unique participant number to be used on all surveys, journal logs, and interview sheets used for data collection to maintain participant confidentiality on documents. The preliminary surveys were then completed.

The agenda for the first class consisted of an icebreaker (paired sharing) of the following: “Think of a time when God prompted you to do something. What happened? How did you know it was from God? Share with the person next to you.” Following this, we reviewed “The Basics” on learning how to hear God’s voice (see Appendix F for the weekly class outlines). We began with the John 10:2-5 passage from the biblical foundations chapter, discussed the different ways God speaks that would be covered in the class, taught on the *Four Keys to Hearing God’s Voice*, by Mark Virkler, discussed how we know if something is from God, and introduced The Noticing Hypothesis from the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter. The class ended with a practical application journaling exercise and a silent prayer partner exercise (each person was to listen for

God's voice and how to pray for their partner and then share what they heard or sensed God saying).

The class ended by reviewing the Hearing God Journal Log that would be used to capture the ways they heard God's speaking and to record what God said. Time was spent discussing why responding to what God says is important and where to record that on the log. This was important. Capturing how they respond to what God said is an indication that they actually heard from God.

Each subsequent class followed the basic pattern including a welcome, icebreaker, and sharing of the testimonies of how participants heard God speak the previous week followed by a section called "Review, Going Deeper, and Questions" focused on the week before, the introduction of the new teaching topic, followed by practical in-class exercises and a review of the homework for the following week.

In the first few weeks of the class, two of the context associates who were taking the class were asked to give feedback on things that worked well during a given class and things that did not work so that adjustments could be made early as needed. The essence of the feedback given indicated that the format of the class and discussion worked, the handouts were helpful, and the number of people attending was great. The feedback also recommended that I not ask people directly to acknowledge if they did not hear God's voice. The concern was that this may make people uncomfortable or that participants might feel inadequate that they did not hear God. My heart in asking was to help people who might be struggling. It was good feedback.

On week five, March 4, it was requested by several folks who were originally planning on being out of town on the final class night which was scheduled for two

weeks later on March 18, that we have the last class on March 11. After considering this request with the overall group it was decided to have the last session on two nights to allow maximum participation. On March 11 the World Health Organization declared that the Coronavirus was a pandemic. Two days later our church Administrative Council decided that all church activities in the actual church building would cease effective Sunday, March 13 and that everything would move to an online venue. The last class was split into two groups. The first group met as originally planned on March 11 at church. Seven people attended. The second group met on March 18 via Zoom. Five people attended.

During the last class, the participants completed the post-surveys. The collection of the post-surveys from the online group was challenging. It took several weeks to obtain the rest of the data. Participants from the online class mailed, scanned, and personally dropped off their surveys. A gentle reminder was sent to the participants who had not sent their information in. Care was taken to give reminders without violating the consent form that states their participation is completely voluntary and they can drop out at any time. Of the seventeen participants who completed the class, fifteen completed preliminary and post-surveys, journal logs, and post-interviews.

The general demographics of the fifteen participants who had completed the surveys, journal logs, and post interviews are shown in the below figures 1a, 1b, and 1c. Things to highlight is that there were twice as many women (ten) as men (five) in the class. 80% of the group was between the age of fifty-six and seventy-four, while only 20% were between the age of forty and fifty-five.

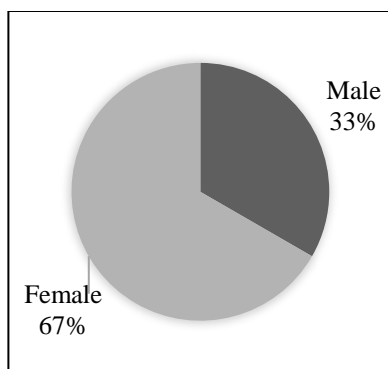


Figure 1a. Gender of Participants

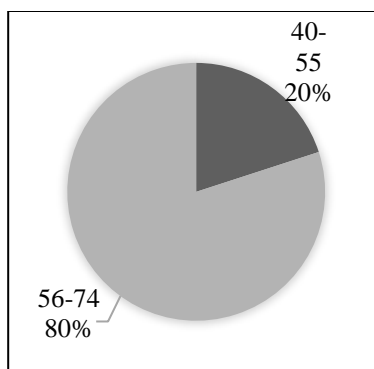


Figure 1b. Age of Participants

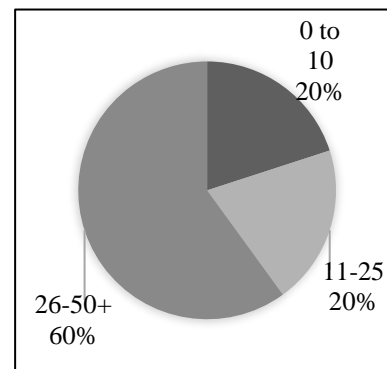


Figure 1c. Years Participants Have Been Christian

Although we do have adults who are younger than forty, we did not have any participation in this study from this group. A contributing factor could be that there was no childcare offered for this class. We tend to get higher participation in the twenty to thirty-nine age group when childcare is offered.

It is also important to note that the percentage of those who were newer Christians (three people) was only 20% of the group. Of the three, two were male and one was female. What is interesting to note about these three persons is all of them had some Christian roots in childhood and many years outside of the church. They were all in the fifty-six to seventy-four age group, and each of them came back to church in the past one to four years. The other thing to note is that 80% of the participants had been Christians between eleven and fifty-plus years. The participants were not new to the faith by any stretch of the imagination.

Finally, it was interesting to note as Figures 2a and 2b indicate below that 100% of the participants who signed up for the course are regular attenders. They each reported they attend three to four times per month. This is a group of committed people.

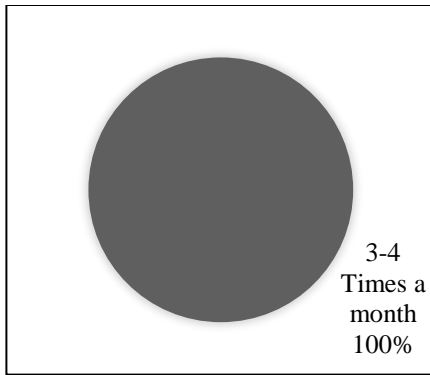


Figure 2a. How Often Worship at Church

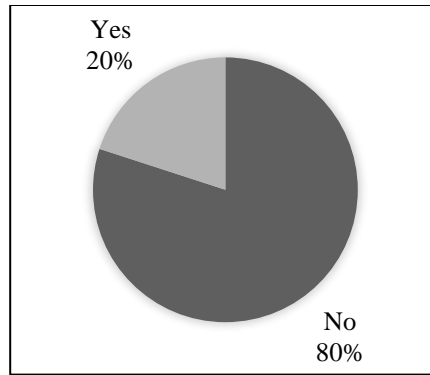


Figure 2b. Previously Taught to Hear God's Voice

Additionally, of those, 80% had never been taught to hear God's voice previously. One of the underlying suspicions with this project is that many Christians in mainline denominations have never been taught how to hear God's voice. This assumption was validated for this class as only three (20% of the participants) had previously been taught how to hear God's voice. Of the three who did learn how to hear God's voice, two of them indicated they rarely have heard God speak in their lifetime. The third one communicated that they hear God speak often (weekly).

### Summary of Learning

When looking at the data from the preliminary and post surveys there were several before and after responses with minimal differences. Of those questions, the one that surprised me the most was the question "what best describes your view of God?" in terms of how God interacts with creation. See figure 3. The preliminary and post-surveys indicate little change in responses.

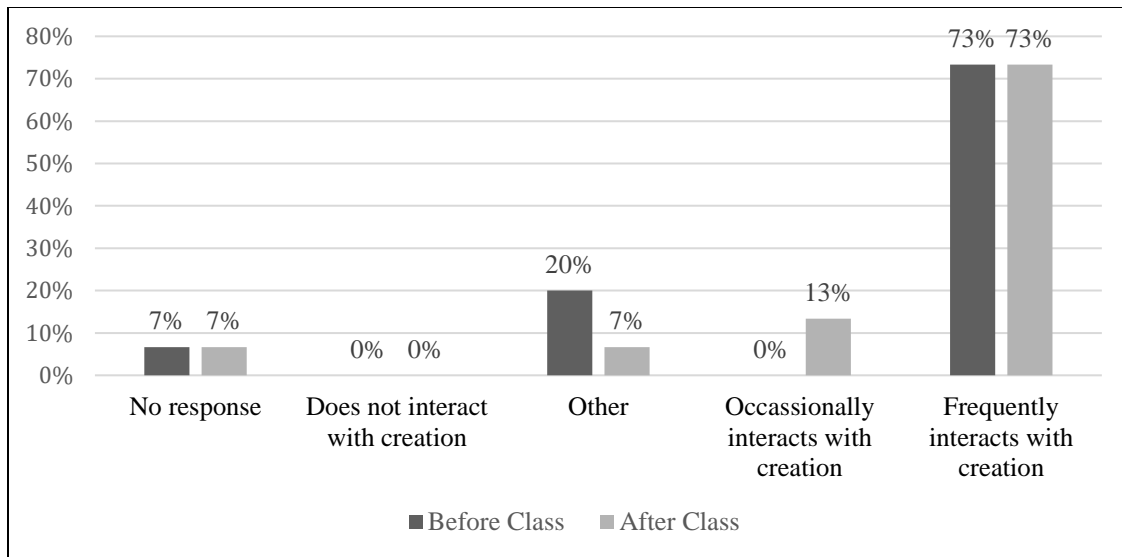


Figure 3. What Best Describes Your View of God?

Seventy-three percent (eleven participants) indicated they believe God frequently interacts with creation before and after the class. The other 27% of responses either skipped the question or selected “other” for their response. It appears that for this class a person’s overall view of God, of how often God interacts with creation, does not correlate to whether or not they hear God’s voice and the frequency of those communications. The belief that God frequently interacts with creation does not necessarily translate to a belief that God wants to personally interact and speak with them.

This is surprising because of the number of people who indicated they heard God speak in various ways during the class along with an increase in the frequency of those communications. For example, when participants were asked how often they heard God speaking to them before taking this class 87% indicated it was not that often. The responses varied from one person who did not answer the question, to a few who were not sure if they had ever heard God speak, to others who said they have rarely heard God speak in their lifetime, and a few others who have heard God’s voice only a few times a year. Only 13% of participants at the beginning of the class reported hearing God’s voice



often (they indicated they hear God weekly). See figure 4. This is especially alarming given that 80% of the class had been Christians between eleven and fifty years.

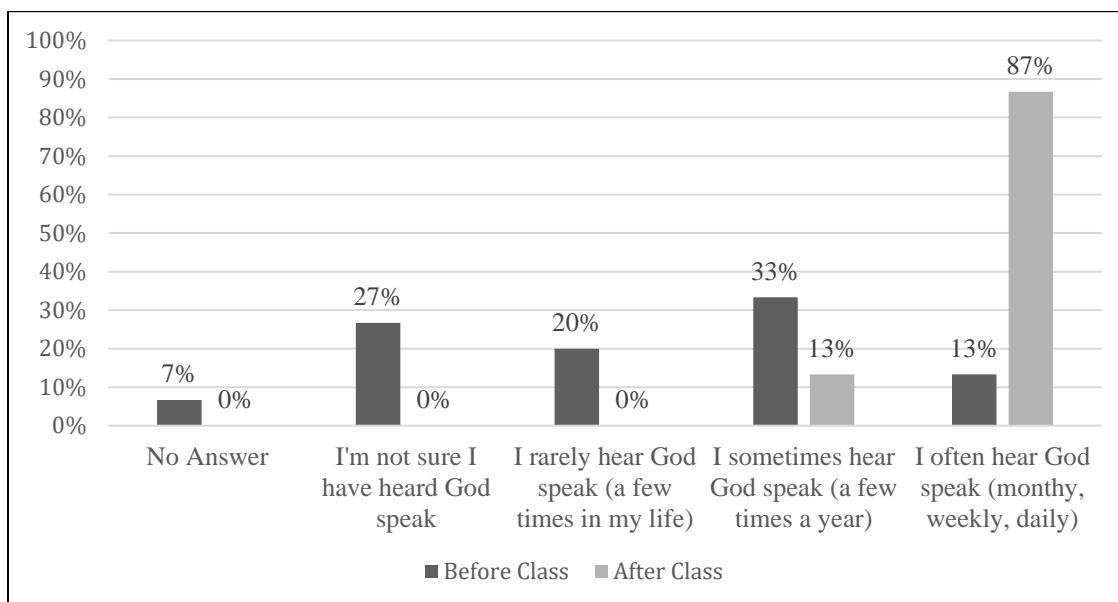


Figure 4. Which Describes How Often You Hear God Speaking to you?

Twenty percent were between eleven and twenty-five years and 60% were between twenty-six and fifty-plus years.

After taking the class the percentages have completely switched. See figure 5. Eighty-seven percent of participants now report hearing God speak to them often (monthly, weekly, or daily). Only 13% of participants report sometimes hearing God speak which is quantified as a few times a year. In addition to this, of the thirteen out of fifteen participants who reported that they often heard God speak during the six-week class as the below figure illustrates, 15% heard God speak monthly, 46% heard God speak weekly, and 39% heard God speak daily. This is pretty incredible given that the majority of the participants did not often hear God speak before taking this class.

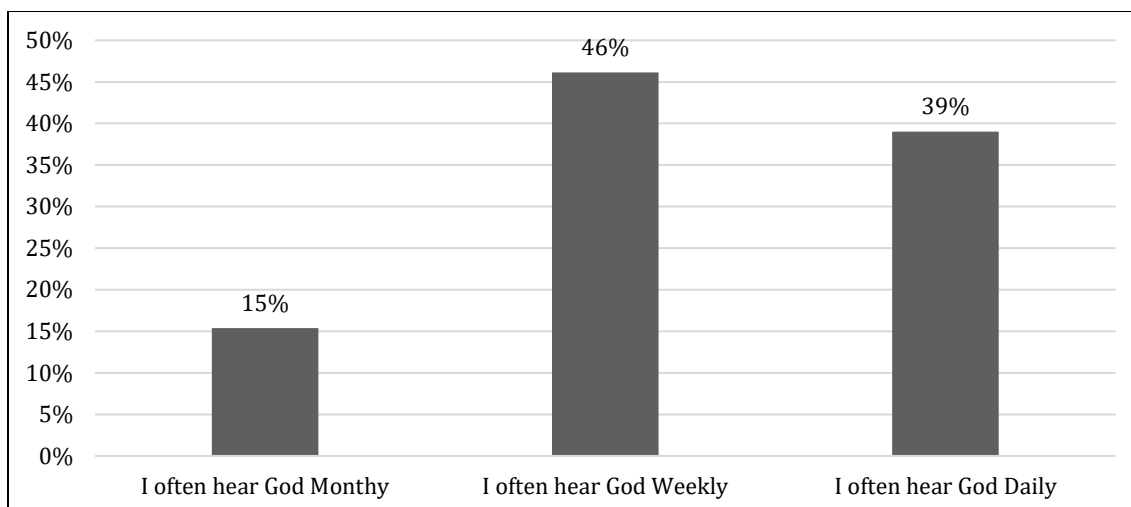


Figure 5. Frequency of the 87% Who Often Heard God Speak During the Class.

When looking at the frequency of spiritual practices both before the class and after we find that there is an increase in the anticipated frequency of practicing the following disciplines. See figure 6 for the specifics. The largest overall gain was

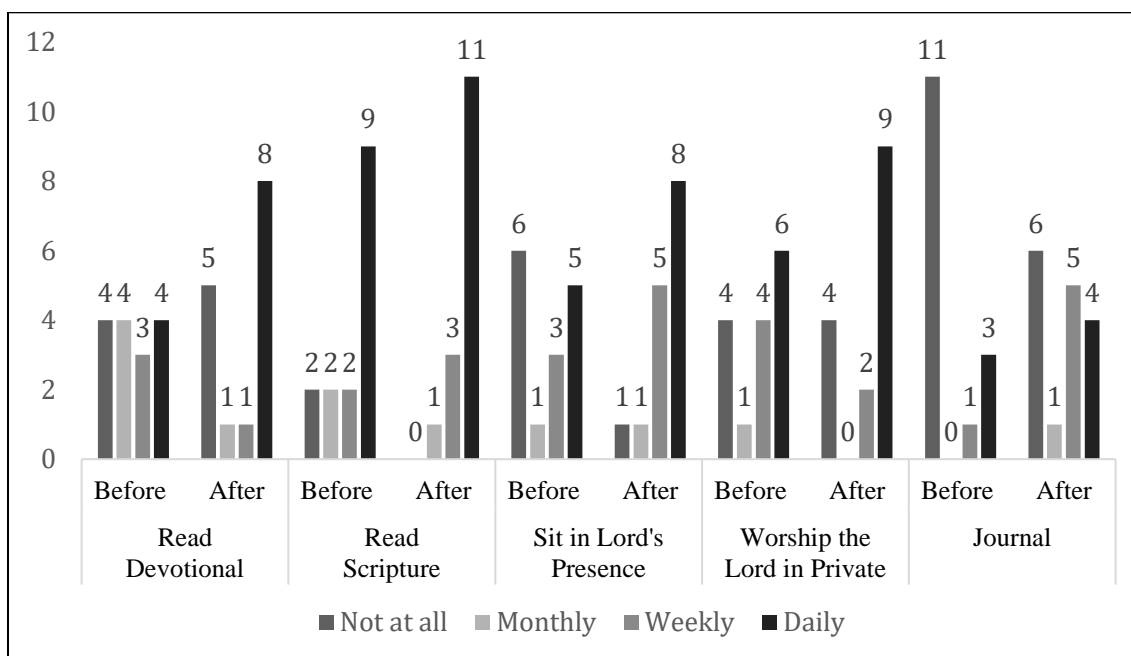


Figure 6. How Frequently Participants Engage with Various Spiritual Disciplines

in the spiritual practice of journaling. This is not surprising as this was one of the ways the class was taught to hear God's voice more clearly, namely through two-way journaling (recording the flow of spontaneous thoughts from the Holy Spirit).

Another important realization is that when looking at the number of ways God spoke to participants previously during their entire lifetime compared to the number of ways God spoke to them during this six-week class is eye-opening. When looking at this chart (see figure 7a below) we must remember that only 13% of participants had heard from the Lord often (meaning a monthly, weekly, or daily basis). The other 87% reported they were either unsure if they had heard from God during their lifetime to rarely (a few times in their life), to sometimes hearing God speak a few times a year. Figure 7 shows that participants heard God speak overall in more times and ways they had ever heard God speak their entire life as Christians during a short six-week class. Everyone in the class heard God speak and many in multiple ways. Additionally, on average every person in the class heard God speak to them in two new ways during the six-week period.

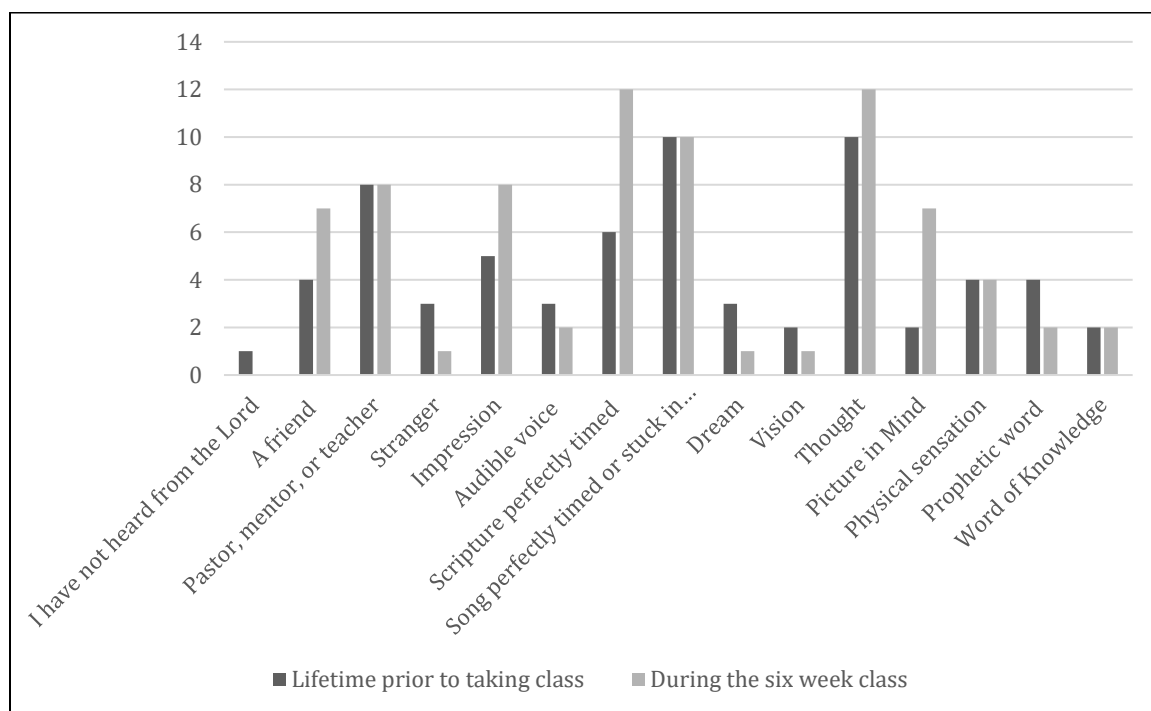


Figure 7. How Have You Heard From the Lord?

Touch is an important way God communicates with us and lets us know that He is present. Sometimes we just need that physical touch reminding us that God is near. The

most common ways participants felt God's presence were through a physical sensation (trembling, shaking, electricity, and tingling), tears of sorrow or conviction, tears of joy or awe, and an overwhelming sense of peace. The below figure 8 shows the number of ways participants felt God's presence.

Of the thirteen participants (87% of the participants) who felt God physically during the six-week class, each participant experienced God physically an average of two and a half times in new ways that they had not previously experienced. It is also noteworthy to mention again that participants felt God's presence almost as many ways during the six-week time as they had in their lifetime especially with some of the more unusual manifestations of God's presence (see figure 8). Three people heard God audibly, three people experienced unexpected laughter (i.e. Holy Laughter), and three people experienced internal (their body grew warmer or colder) and external changes in temperature (the room or someone's hand grew warmer or colder).

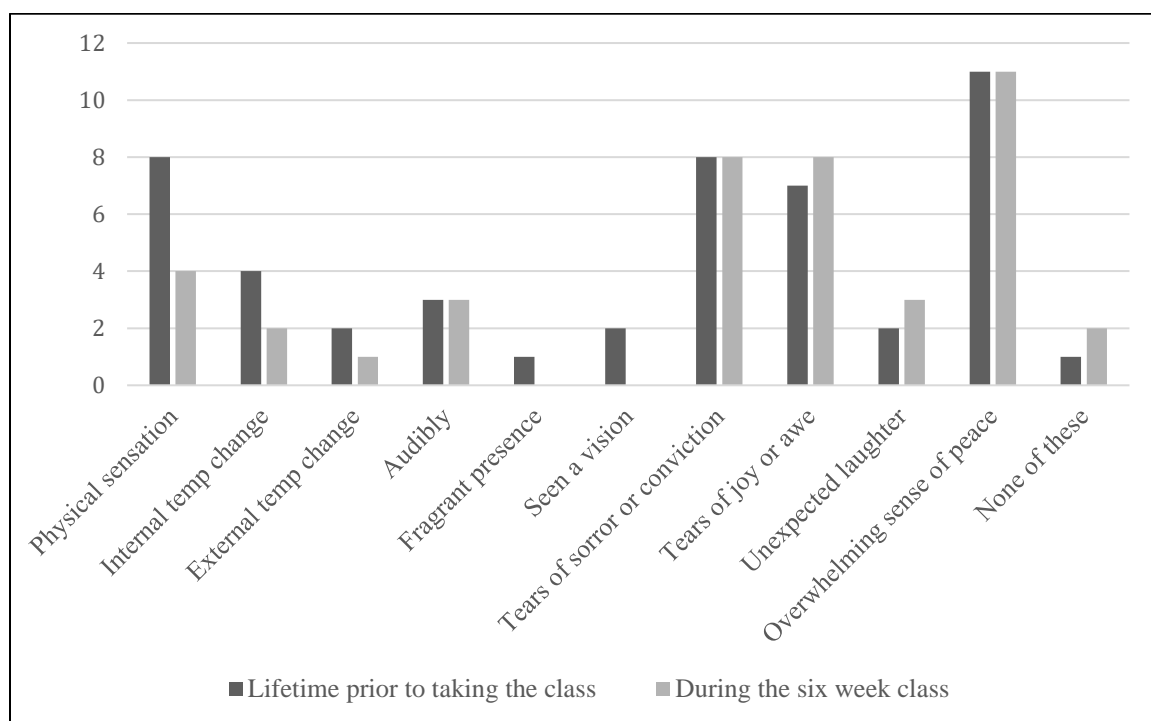


Figure 8. How Have You Felt the Presence of God?

There were two questions on the post-survey designed to ascertain how participants see their future engagement with spiritual disciplines and their level of engagement within the church body to be impacted. Ten out of the 15 survey respondents answered question 19 on the post-survey regarding their anticipated future engagement with spiritual disciplines. Below is the feedback for question 19:

- Not being concerned about “how it looks” but really focusing on growing closer to Jesus. “Naturally expect the supernatural.”
- Stronger than before – more thoroughly more clearly. It has become more important to me to “hear” God’s voice or other means to get my attention.
- Will listen and engage more daily.
- I see me being more aware of God’s voice and taking notice of small things that I may have not noticed or attributed to God before.
- I will continue to seek God daily and spend more time in Scripture.
- Hope to continue to journal, read Scripture, and worship.
- I hope to have greater strength in God by fellowship with others and have a stronger support group for spiritual guidance.
- I feel I know better God is speaking to me and to pay attention and listen.
- I see myself more willing to talk about hearing God’s voice to others, especially outside the church.
- I feel more in touch with others I come in contact with. Find myself asking “what can I say? What should I do? Why have you placed this person in front of me today? What is my purpose or place in this event or situation?”

The comments indicate mostly that participants are more sensitive to noticing God speak in the moment. If we call that a spiritual discipline then the increase is tremendous. This is very exciting for me. This would be what some call practicing the presence of God with us with the focus of being more aware of God leading them throughout their day. Responses also indicate an increase in time with Scripture, journaling, worship, and spiritual guidance.

Question 20 sought to determine how they see their anticipated future level of engagement with the Church to be impacted. Below are responses from 11 of the 15 participants who answered this question:

- I would encourage others to listen for God and would use what God impresses upon me for the benefit of others.
- Stay active – get more involved. I am now on the Administrative Council, I have committed to helping with Sunday School, I have begun to be more involved in the planning stage of the Praise Band, planning to take more classes as they are offered at church and through Pastor Lori.
- I don't think my level of engagement within the church body will be impacted in the short term. I feel like there's too much going on in my life to really increase my level of engagement at this time.
- I feel closer to the people in the class. Miss going to church [during coronavirus pandemic].
- I am involved within the church body but I would like to be more involved in mentoring others.

- Not sure, I can only recommend this type of class to them. I would try to explain how and when I hear God's voice but although I am no longer an infant, I am not a veteran yet either.
- About the same.
- I'm hoping to form many relationships in the church.
- More involved now that I know others (I am an introvert.)
- Limited so far. I have felt engaged already so maybe a deeper knowledge of direction and purpose.

The feedback above indicates that closer relationships were formed through this class and that will impact future engagement. My prayer is now that they have learned to hear God's voice more clearly that they will step into opportunities to serve that are both offered by the church and new opportunities that God puts on their hearts. It is important to note that 9 of the 15 participants were already actively involved in the church before taking this class.

The hypothesis and intention of this project were if members of the congregation are trained to better hear and discern God's voice the self-reported spiritual aliveness and vitality of the participants will increase. As a result, they will be encouraged to step out in faith and be obedient to what they are hearing God say. The above data has shown that participants did learn to better hear God's voice by the clear movement of those who heard God often before the class (only 13%) to those who heard God speak often after the class (87%). Figures 9a and 9b additionally show that 87% of participants self-reported that taking this class impacted their relationship with Christ and their spiritual vitality overall had increased, while only 13% said that it had remained the same. This finding is

consistent with the percentage of people who now hear God often. The amount of qualitative increase was quantified by selecting from three choices: increased a little, increased, or significantly increased. The charts below show the participants self-assessments.

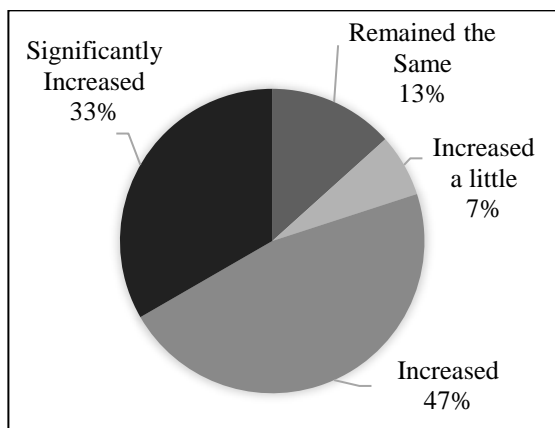


Figure 9a. Impact of Learning to Hear God's Voice on My Relationship with Christ

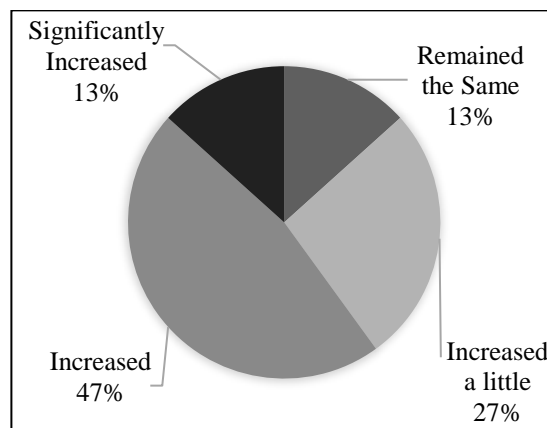


Figure 9b. Impact of Learning to Hear God's Voice on My Spiritual Vitality.

As for the last part of the hypothesis that asserted that as a result of learning how to hear God's voice they would step out in faith and respond to what God said, much of this was captured in the journal logs and in sharing and testimony during the class sessions. Some examples of how people responded to what God said included things like taking the time to reflect on what God shared with them, sending a card or making a phone call to someone that God put on their heart, to sharing words God gave them to encourage, comfort, or strengthen another. Other examples shared included things like having a burden to share something with a stranger God put on their heart, to a couple of others hearing very clearly to call someone (which they did), to writing down dreams and visions God gave them. It was evident from reading the journals that participants did respond. I'm sure the question on the journal log helped to facilitate this as well. It certainly provided for a written reminder to respond and obey when God speaks.



There were several key learnings during this project. During the interviews, I sought to learn some specific things using open-ended questions that would allow participants to share what was on their hearts. One of the first questions asked was, what was the best and what was the hardest thing about the class. The best thing about the class for many included interactions with other participants. It was said more than once that learning from each other and hearing about their experiences on how God spoke to them was very beneficial to learning to hear God's voice. Others commented along this line that learning the ways God spoke helped them recognize God's voice better.

It struck me that one participant said the timing of the class was the best thing. They needed this class and said it helped get them through a very difficult time. The interactions with other classmates were also extremely helpful for this person both during and in-between class sessions. They received phone calls, texts, and spontaneous cards in the mail with prophetic words that encouraged and strengthened them. This person mentioned they do not know where they would be without this class. The last session's focus was on learning *lectio divino* and we used Psalm 46 which turned out to be this person's saving grace as they dealt with the loss of a loved one to the coronavirus. The words of the Psalm went into their spirit and became a source of strength during challenging times. God even gave them a few timely words for all during the graveside service of their loved one.

For still others learning to journal what they heard God say was the best. A couple of people had never really journaled that much and more than one had a real breakthrough in learning two-way journaling (speaking to God and recording what they hear God saying back to them). One woman who thought she was going to struggle with

the journals came into one Sunday service and said she had the most wonderful conversation with God. She has been hooked ever since and spends many days listening and writing down what she hears God say.

Some of the hardest things about the class for some was the sharing time as it required participants to open up with others. Some of that stemmed from participants' fear of saying the wrong things. Sharing became easier as the class progressed. For others doing the homework was a challenge (completing the five journal sheets per week and other assignments relevant to each week). They were not prepared for the amount of homework (it was greater than the previous short-term studies they attended in the past). One participant mentioned if they had known how much homework they may not have signed up, and that would have been a bad thing for them as they grew a lot in learning how to hear God's voice and step out by saying and doing what God was leading them to do. For others, the hardest thing was hearing God on the spot in the class and the journaling. Some people did it but never really connected with it.

Another interview question asked participants to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten on hearing God's voice (one meaning they have never heard God's voice before and ten meaning they hear God clearly all the time). On average participants had little less than a four-point spread from where they started to how they assess themselves at the end of the class. When asked what the contributing factor was in moving for example from a five to an eight, participants cited the following reasons:

- Several cited becoming aware of and learning the ways God speaks.
- Learning how to notice God speaking during their day.

- If you think something is God's voice, do not hold back. Act on what God is saying in the moment.
- Practice and exercises in class and applying learning during the week.
- Taking intentional time to listen to God every day and do not expect it to come in a certain way (be open to God speaking different ways).
- Doing the homework (journaling).

Another interview question asked what worked and what did not work. Most if not all of the participants liked the overall format and teaching topics of the class. It seemed to the participants that it was a natural progression that built on the previous week's lessons. A common thing folks would like to see different was to intentionally change the sharing partners each week. Even though it was never stated to share with the same people, folks naturally sat next to the same folks each week. I certainly agree that the next time intentionally asking people to find new sharing partners will be very beneficial. The only qualifier that was given to the class regarding sharing partners was for married couples in the class not to share with their spouse.

Finally, things I would do differently would possibly include offering an eight-week class instead of six weeks. I sensed that I underestimated the amount of time needed and the ability of the participants to learn two-way journaling and tuning into spontaneous thoughts, pictures, and impressions from God. Giving more time at the beginning of the class to set the foundational principles of the class will help participants not want to give up. At the very beginning of the class, I could tell some of the class was not understanding.

One couple almost did not come back after the first week. Two significant things happened that had them come back. The first occurred at the end of the first session. We were doing a journaling exercise and one of the questions was to respond to the journal prompt, “God what do you want to say to us tonight?” Two participants in the class heard the same thing (I heard it too, but did not say anything, as I thought it was more powerful coming from participants). They sensed that God wanted to encourage folks “to keep an open mind and come back next week.”

The second thing was the morning of the next class session their devotional reading for that talk talked about learning how to hear God’s voice. They saw this as a sign and committed themselves fully to the class. The husband of this couple in the final interview rated himself a one (can not hear God at all) and at the end of the class rated himself at an eight. Getting over his fear of failure was also key. His wife moved from a six to a nine. This couple also gave a spontaneous testimony on Sunday morning about how powerful this class is and the difference hearing God was making in their life. We also have two other participants give spontaneous testimonies about the class as well during the Sunday morning worship.

Adding two weeks to the class would allow more time to teach on two-way journaling as well. After the second week, it was clear to me that several struggled to complete the journal sheets. The next day I felt the need to send them journal samples from when I was learning to hear God’s voice via email that I had from years ago. Sending the samples was quite helpful. In the samples, I also used the self-assessment criteria on the journal log (Not sure if it was God, Might have been God, Pretty sure it was God, and Very certain). This produced fruit as the following Sunday, I began to hear

the first testimonies people were having with recording what they heard God say. In future classes, handing out samples should be effective.

Finally, the last thing I would likely change is doing the *lectio divina* class exercise on the second week instead of the last class. This was a powerful experience both for the class and for me as the facilitator. It might have helped people catalyze hearing God through Scripture earlier in the class which may have helped them overall. I would certainly have to pray about this. It could have been the previous five weeks that made it such a powerful experience as well.

### **Future Considerations**

#### *Coronavirus Impacts and Future Considerations*

The coronavirus restrictions impacted the tail end of the project. It required moving to an online platform (Zoom Video Communications) to complete the last class. I selected Zoom because it was the only online video conferencing I had been familiar with, as I was in a group as a participant and had been using it for a year and a half. I signed up for a Zoom account two days before the last class and created an online meeting. It was fairly easy to use and enabled us to complete the class.

After the class, it became evident to me that this course is greatly needed in the body of Christ. I would love to offer it again and even possibly to those in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference. The coronavirus restrictions continue to place obstacles to in-person meetings with the two main obstacles being those imposed by government

restrictions and by people's comfort level with in-person meetings which would additionally require people to wear masks.

Given that it looks like both obstacles will last into at least the near future, how the class is offered will need to change. I do plan on offering it again and will possibly experiment with trying a hybrid model that has both in-person and online participants. Zoom will be the platform used, mainly because I have not researched other possible virtual classroom platforms. The main video teaching platform feature this class will need to support is the ability to have breakout groups. The class feedback indicated that sharing partners were an important element to participants' learning to hear God's voice and to practice listening with each other. Zoom already has this ability.

For the sake of time, since I plan on offering this class again, I will need to upgrade my Zoom subscription to utilize this feature. I will need to recruit an assistant who can help in the administration of creating the breakout rooms during each session and other duties as needed. My experience from participating in Zoom groups when breakout rooms are utilized is that someone else sets up the groups while the moderator or leader continues to teach. This provides the ability to have a more seamless encounter allowing participants to go immediately into their group. Otherwise, they would have to wait for the leader to set it up on-the-spot as this is not something that can be done before the meeting.

This approach may require some more technical assistance to make sure everyone in the in-person meeting can see and hear the online participants. The hybrid class model will allow those persons who prefer in-person to online. It will also allow people who live further away or have busier schedules to participate thereby eliminating travel time. The

number of in-person attendees would need to be limited to the size of the room. I will continue to pray about how to best do this.

Another reason for the hybrid class is to provide an avenue for those who want and hunger for an in-person meeting. There is something powerful when two or three or more gather in Jesus' name. Now, more than ever, God may also be calling the Church to gather in smaller groupings from five to twelve in various locations. This will allow more people to share and grow together on a whole range of topics. Too many people have gotten comfortable with simply coming to church, listening, and going home without engaging in the truth of God's word for themselves and dialogue with others. Learning from each other again was a very important aspect of the class. In the event the in-person gatherings need to be canceled due to changes in coronavirus restrictions, we can still have the training online.

Having an online opportunity can also be offered to different groups. I can see also offering this to pastors as they may be more willing to learn and grow together. A class of this type would also be modified with the intention of not only teaching on how God speaks but also ways that they can better teach their congregations in the corporate environment and with the teams they lead. The topics of the class can also be easily incorporated into sermons, in addition to them teaching the class themselves.

The final piece that would need to be adapted is the ability for people to take the preliminary and post surveys online. Although the surveys were for a research project, they provide valuable information. They will provide a quick way to identify how participants have heard God in the past, how frequently they hear God's voice, and the various ways God has spoken to them in the past. This information will be helpful to

know before the class and will aid in what topics to stress in the teaching. The post surveys will help assess the overall effectiveness of the class and will highlight what worked and what did not work.

### *Youth and Young Adults*

The possibility of modifying this class for youth or young adults could be very fruitful. It has always been my belief that youth and young adults will learn how to hear God's voice faster than adults, namely because they tend to have less spiritual and religious baggage. For instance, a few months before teaching this class I had the opportunity to teach the youth for two weeks following the ALPHA class. During one of those sessions, we did an exercise where they were challenged to listen for a word that would be encouraging, comforting, and strengthening for another youth in the class. They were each assigned a (non-sibling) partner. The instructions were to ask God for a word from the Lord for their partner. I explained one of the ways God speaks to his people is through spontaneous thoughts.

After prayer and some time dedicated for them to listen to God's voice, they gave their words to each other. It was very clear by their excitement and what they shared that they heard from God. I watched as one after another said they heard a word. I do not remember the specifics other than they heard God and were truly encouraged by the word each of them received. I do not think it will be difficult for someone who has been called to youth ministry to take the agendas and convert them to a youth audience. I heard a long time ago that the same Holy Spirit that is living in adults is the same in youth (there is no "Junior Holy Spirit").



I would not necessarily recommend changing this course for young adults other than offering it in a class format and including childcare for families. In my experience, young adults want to learn together and be mentored by adults who are further along in their walk with Jesus. They want to be challenged, encouraged, and disciplined. I typically recommend setting up accountability partners for young adults. A simple way to incorporate accountability partners is to dedicate fifteen to twenty minutes of class time for this purpose. An easy way to add this in is by using John Wesley's Twenty Two Questions.

### **Conclusion**

The doctoral project has had a positive outcome on the participants' ability to hear God. Teaching others to hear God's voice has resulted in 87% of the class participants reporting that they now often (monthly, weekly, daily) hear God's voice compared to only 13% before the class. As stated previously, this is notable given that 80% of the class had been Christians for over eleven years most of whom rarely heard God speak to them during their life or sometimes heard God speak only a few times a year. As a result of this class participants' relationship with Christ increased in closeness along with their spiritual vitality.

What has been exciting to watch since the project ended is the way God is speaking to participants after the class. For example, one of the participants is on our worship team. A month after the class completed this person communicates that they sense that God wants us to do an extended time of worship on Sunday after the message. They heard from God, it was confirmed by another praise team member, including the

names of the songs to sing and other details. They also believed that we needed to have a time of prayer for those who would like someone to pray with them after the worship.

This was exciting to have someone hear God and respond by following through to do what God said. This was also during the coronavirus lockdown so it would all be online. It resonated with my spirit and I agreed to go with what the Holy Spirit was up to. In the end, it turned out to be very much welcomed and needed time to worship and pray. This was an example of how someone from the class heard God and responded and followed through with the direction God gave them. It was also a learning opportunity to teach about being flexible with listening for the Holy Spirit in the moment and not planning it so rigidly that God could not work in the midst of it.

We have another person on the praise team that started picking out music for Sunday morning. The folks who pick out the music have no idea what the sermon is going to be about when they pre-pick the songs. I overheard a conversation about how they do it after the class. They pray over the songs, pick out potential songs for the coming weeks and then lay aside the ones they get the sense “not this one” or are drawn to a song that is a yes in their spirit. Every week the songs go perfectly with the message. It is clear that God knew what songs needed to be sung on which weeks. Some may not think this is hearing God, but you will not be able to convince those who hear what God is putting on their heart. They know and believe God is helping them pick songs.

One of the main things I have learned more than ever is that people in the church need to be taught how to hear God’s voice for themselves. God has been speaking since the beginning of time and his voice goes out to all the earth. The question is do we hear God speaking to us regularly, will we take the time to learn how God communicates to

us, will we listen and obey? Not only does the church need to learn how to hear God's voice, but we also need to desire God's voice above all the others that are speaking into our lives. For the church to thrive we need to start listening to God and stop listening to all the other things that are tingling our ears.

Regarding what I would do differently and how most of that was covered in the previous section. One of the next things I would like to consider is offering this class on a broader scale using an online platform like Zoom. It could potentially be a conference-wide class for pastors and church leaders who can then teach it to their people. This class will become a regular part of our foundational teaching curriculum for the congregation.

What is valuable for future work is the impact teaching people how to hear God's voice could have on the overall local body of Christ, which would naturally spill over into our homes, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, community, and world. One of the components that I wanted to focus on was the possible congregation-wide effect that having a subset of people who learned how to hear God's voice would have on the greater congregation. Although we did have spontaneous testimony generated from participants on weeks three, four, and five on Sunday mornings, we have not met back at the church since that time due to the coronavirus restrictions.

Part of my initial thoughts on how this could work was to have participants listen specifically to what God wanted to say to the congregation that morning and to share what God put on their hearts after the opening worship. They would be instructed to respond to a journal prompt question that asked, God what do you want to say to us today? The journal prompt could be a couple of questions as God may want to say different things (prophetic words, words of knowledge, etc.). Every time we did this

exercise in class it was amazing and on point what God wanted to share with the class. I believe the potential impact for congregations is to become more alive by hearing fellow congregants sharing what God said. This was my experience in the churches I visited. This follows the model as given by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that says, “For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.”

There is certainly a level of risk in doing this and I think the risk to the potential gain could be transformational. There would certainly have to be some parameters around how this is done so that is in good order. I have been to churches that already do this. Their people have been taught how to hear God’s voice and many times what they said during this time was what I needed to hear. It adds another level of aliveness to the service and an added encounter with God’s heart beyond the worship and preaching.

Another thing that could be added from a congregational standpoint is inviting people to come forward to receive a prophetic word and prayer from someone who has learned how to hear God’s voice. These are things I would like to add to our services when we begin to return to the building in the future. These types of things we do not see very often at mainline denominational services. Lack of hearing God’s voice and responding to what God said could be one of the main reasons the church at large is in decline. We have to ask ourselves is there really life apart from hearing God’s voice? I say no. There is nothing more lifegiving than a fresh word from the Spirit.

In conclusion, let us remember that the length of time someone has been a faithful church attender does not mean that they know how to hear God’s voice. My hope is that everyone will learn how to hear God’s voice daily for themselves. There is not a single day God does not speak to us. Will we learn to listen and obey?

**APPENDIX A**  
**PRELIMINARY SURVEY**

Preliminary Survey Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assigned Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey<sup>1</sup> and for your participation in this 6 Week Class on “Learning How to Better Hear God’s Voice.” Your responses are confidential. Please sign the consent form for the project if you have not already. Statistics and comments from the surveys will be shared in the final project report, but your names and personal identifying information will not be used.

1. What is your gender?
  - ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
  - ☐ Prefer not to say
  
2. How long have you been a Christian? (Start from the time you made a personal decision for Christ, i.e. not ‘since birth.’)
  - ☐ I’m not currently
  - ☐ 0 to 10 years
  - ☐ 11 to 25 years
  - ☐ 26-50+ years
  
3. What is your age?<sup>2</sup>
  - ☐ 18 – 23
  - ☐ 24 – 39
  - ☐ 40 – 55
  - ☐ 56 – 74
  - ☐ 75 +
  
4. Briefly describe your denominational background. (i.e. “I have attended a United Methodist church for seven years but before that belonged to a Baptist church for 16 years.”)
 

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5. How often do you attend worship at your local church?
  - ☐ 1 – 5 times a year

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<sup>1</sup> Madeline Henners, “*A Guided Plan Designed to Deepen One’s Intimacy with God*” (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2019), 199. The majority of this survey came from Madeline C. Henners final DMin project from May 2019 at United Theological Seminary with permission to use. Some questions have been modified slightly or new questions added.

<sup>2</sup> Age categories are based on generational categories (i.e. baby boomers, gen x, millennial, etc.)

- ☐ 6 – 11 times a year
- ☐ 1 – 2 times a month
- ☐ 3 – 4 times a month

6. Which best describes your view of God?

- ☐ Does not interact with creation
- ☐ Occasionally interacts with creation
- ☐ Frequently interacts with creation
- ☐ Other, please specify:

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7. Which statement below best describes your relationship with Christ?<sup>3</sup>

- ☐ “I do not believe in God.”
- ☐ “I believe in God, but am not sure about Christ. My Faith is not a significant part of my life.”
- ☐ “I believe in Jesus and I am working on what it means to get to know him.”
- ☐ “I feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.”
- ☐ “My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do.”

8. Have you previously been taught how to hear God’s voice?

- ☐ No.
- ☐ Yes.
- ☐ If yes, explain when and in what context (class, book you read, preaching, etc. and how long ago?)

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9. Which best describes your how often you hear God speaking to you?

- ☐ I have not heard God speak to me
- ☐ I’m not sure if I have heard God’s voice before
- ☐ I rarely hear God speaking to me (a few times in my life)
- ☐ I sometimes hear God speak to me (a few times a year)
- ☐ I often hear God speak to me (check frequency):  
                             \_\_\_ Monthly              \_\_\_ Weekly              \_\_\_ Daily
- ☐ Other, please specify

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<sup>3</sup> Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *MOVE: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011), 21.

10. How frequently do you pray? (This excludes church services. Choose the category that best fits you.)

- ☐ Less than once a month
- ☐ At least once a month
- ☐ At least once a week
- ☐ Less than 30 minutes daily
- ☐ Between 30–60 minutes daily
- ☐ More than 60 minutes daily

11. How frequently do you do the following (circle your response)?

- |  |            |         |        |       |
|--|------------|---------|--------|-------|
| • Read a devotional (book, online, or podcast)   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Read Scripture   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Pray for my family and friends   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Pray for my church   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Pray for the country and world   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Sit quietly in the Lord's presence   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Worship the Lord in private (with singing or other actions)                                | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • How often do you record what God says to you in a journal, computer notes, or other means? | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |

12. What does your prayer time consist of? (Check all that apply in a given week.)

- ☐ Petitions (i.e. praying for those who are sick, family, peace)
- ☐ Scripture reading
- ☐ Singing to the Lord
- ☐ Silence and listening for God to speak
- ☐ Gratitude (i.e. sharing with God what you are grateful or thankful for)
- ☐ Music playing in background
- ☐ Dancing before the Lord
- ☐ Other, please specify:

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13. How often do you fast? (This can be from something other than food.)

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than once a month
- ☐ At least once a month
- ☐ At least once a week
- ☐ More than once a week

14. How often do you read the Bible in your personal time? (Outside of church service or class.)

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Less than once a month
- ☐ At least once a month
- ☐ At least once a week
- ☐ Less than 30 minutes daily
- ☐ Between 30–60 minutes daily
- ☐ More than 60 minutes daily

15. In the last year, what ways did you fast? (Check all the ways you fasted in the last year.)

- ☐ I did not fast this past year
- ☐ One meal of food
- ☐ 12–24 hours from food
- ☐ More than 24 hours from food
- ☐ Single item of food for a period of time (i.e. sweets, soda, meat)
- ☐ Speaking
- ☐ Television & Media (i.e. Netflix, YouTube, Cable)
- ☐ Social Media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)
- ☐ Spending money unnecessarily
- ☐ Other, please specify:

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16. Do you believe God desires to speak with you frequently?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

17. How often do you hear God speaking to you? (Not necessarily an audible voice, but an impression, etc.)

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Regularly

18. How have you heard from the Lord in the past? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ I do not feel I have heard from the Lord
- ☐ Through a friend
- ☐ Through a pastor, mentor, or teacher
- ☐ Through a stranger
- ☐ Through an impression
- ☐ Through an audible voice
- ☐ Through a Scripture perfectly timed
- ☐ Through a song perfectly timed or stuck in your head
- ☐ Through a dream
- ☐ Through a vision
- ☐ Through a thought
- ☐ Through a picture in your mind
- ☐ Through a physical sensation
- ☐ Through a prophetic word (someone shares something about your present or future)
- ☐ Through a word of knowledge (someone shares something about you they couldn't know)
- ☐ Other, please specify:

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19. Do you worship God in private?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (if no, skip to question 21)

20. If yes, how comfortable are you using your body and voice during this private time of worship?

- ☐ Singing  
 \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Clapping  
 \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Hands open

- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Arms raised
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Dancing
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Kneeling
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying on back
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying with face on the floor
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

21. How comfortable are you using your body and voice in public worship settings? (This includes church services, Christian concerts, conferences and retreats.)

- ☐ Singing
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Clapping
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Hands open
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Arms raised
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Dancing
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Kneeling
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying on back
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying with face on the floor
- \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

22. How have you felt the presence of God physically in the past? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Physical sensation (i.e. trembling, shaking, electricity, tingling)
- ☐ Internal temperature change (i.e. Your body grew warmer or colder)
- ☐ External temperature change (i.e. The room or someone's hand grew warmer or colder)
- ☐ Audibly (i.e. Voice of God, angels singing)
- ☐ Fragrant presence
- ☐ Seen a vision
- ☐ Tears of sorrow or conviction
- ☐ Tears of joy or awe
- ☐ Unexpected laughter (i.e. "Holy Laughter")

☐ Overwhelming sense of peace

☐ None of these

☐ Other, please specify:

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23. Thank you for completing the survey! I appreciate your honesty and self-reflection. Please feel free to leave any further comments below that you feel I should know about before you begin this class.

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **POST SURVEY**

Post Survey Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assigned Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey<sup>1</sup> and for your participation in this 6 Week Class on “Learning How to Better Hear God’s Voice.” Your responses are confidential. Statistics and comments from the surveys will be shared in the final project report, but your names and personal identifying information will not be used.

1. After taking this class, which best describes your view of God?

- ☐ Does not interact with creation
- ☐ Occasionally interacts with creation
- ☐ Frequently interacts with creation
- ☐ Other, please specify:

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2. After taking this class, which statement below best describes your relationship with Christ?<sup>2</sup>

- ☐ “I do not believe in God.”
- ☐ “I believe in God, but am not sure about Christ. My Faith is not a significant part of my life.”
- ☐ “I believe in Jesus and I am working on what it means to get to know him.”
- ☐ “I feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.”
- ☐ “My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do.”

3. During this class, which best describes your how often you heard God speaking to you?

- ☐ I have not heard God speak to me
- ☐ I’m not sure if I had heard God’s voice during this class
- ☐ I rarely hear God speaking to me (a few times in my life)
- ☐ I sometimes heard God speak to me (a few times a year)
- ☐ I often heard God speak to me (check frequency):

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<sup>1</sup> Madeline Henners, “*A Guided Plan Designed to Deepen One’s Intimacy with God*” (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2019), p 199. The majority of this survey came from Madeline C. Henners final doctor project with permission. Some questions have been modified, deleted, and new questions added.

<sup>2</sup> Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *MOVE: What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011), p 21.

\_\_\_ Monthly      \_\_\_ Weekly      \_\_\_ Daily

☐ Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

4. After taking this class, how frequently do you anticipate praying? (This excludes church services. Choose the category that best fits you.)

- ☐ Less than once a month  
☐ At least once a month  
☐ At least once a week  
☐ Less than 30 minutes daily  
☐ Between 30–60 minutes daily  
☐ More than 60 minutes daily

5. Since this class began, do you believe God desires to speak with you frequently?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

6. After taking this class, how frequently do you anticipate doing the following:

- |  |            |         |        |       |
|--|------------|---------|--------|-------|
| • Read a devotional (book, online, or podcast)                                       | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Read Scripture   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Pray for my family and friends   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Pray for my church   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Pray for the country and world   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Sit quietly in the Lord's presence   | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Worship the Lord in private (with singing or other actions)                        | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
| • Write in a journal, computer notes, or other means to record what God says to you? | Not at all | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |

7. After taking this class, what do you anticipate your prayer time will consist of? (Check all that apply in a given week.)

- ☐ Petitions (i.e. praying for those who are sick, family, peace)  
☐ Scripture reading  
☐ Singing to the Lord  
☐ Silence and listening for God to speak  
☐ Gratitude (i.e. sharing with God what you are grateful for)

- ☐ Music playing in background
  - ☐ Dancing before the Lord
  - ☐ Journaling
  - ☐ Other, please specify:
- 

8. After taking this class, how often do you anticipate you will fast? (This can be from something other than food.)
- ☐ Never
  - ☐ Less than once a month
  - ☐ At least once a month
  - ☐ At least once a week
  - ☐ More than once a week
9. After taking this class, how often do you anticipate reading the Bible in your personal time? (Outside of church service or class.)
- ☐ Not at all
  - ☐ Less than once a month
  - ☐ At least once a month
  - ☐ At least once a week
  - ☐ Less than 30 minutes daily
  - ☐ Between 30–60 minutes daily
  - ☐ More than 60 minutes daily
10. After taking this class, what ways do you anticipate fasting in the future? (Check all that apply)
- ☐ I did not fast since this class began
  - ☐ One meal of food
  - ☐ 12–24 hours from food
  - ☐ More than 24 hours from food
  - ☐ Single item of food for a period of time (i.e. sweets, soda, meat)
  - ☐ Speaking
  - ☐ Television & Media (i.e. Netflix, YouTube, Cable)
  - ☐ Social Media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)
  - ☐ Spending money unnecessarily
  - ☐ Other, please specify:
- 
- 
11. Since this class began, how often do you hear God speaking to you? (Not necessarily an audible voice, but an impression, etc.)
- ☐ Not at all



☐ Occasionally

☐ Regularly

12. Since this class began, how have you heard from the Lord? (Check all that apply.)

☐ I do not feel I have heard from the Lord

☐ Through a friend

☐ Through a pastor, mentor, or teacher

☐ Through a stranger \_\_\_\_

☐ Through an impression

☐ Through an audible voice

☐ Through a Scripture perfectly timed

☐ Through a song perfectly timed or stuck in your head

☐ Through a dream

☐ Through a vision

☐ Through a thought

☐ Through a picture in your mind

☐ Through a physical sensation

☐ Through a prophetic word (someone shares something about your present or future)

☐ Through a word of knowledge (someone shares something about you they couldn't know)

☐ Other, please specify:

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13. Since this class began, have you worshiped God in private?

☐ Yes

☐ No (if no, skip to question 15)

14. If yes, how comfortable are you using your body and voice during this private time of worship?

☐ Singing

\_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

☐ Clapping

\_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

☐ Hands open

\_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

☐ Arms raised

\_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

☐ Dancing

\_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

☐ Kneeling

\_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

- ☐ Lying on back  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying with face on the floor  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

15. Since this class began, how comfortable are you using your body and voice in public worship settings? (This includes church services, Christian concerts, conferences and retreats.)

- ☐ Singing  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Clapping  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Hands open  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Arms raised  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Dancing  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Kneeling  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying on back  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable
- ☐ Lying with face on the floor  
     \_\_\_ Unable \_\_\_ Not comfortable \_\_\_ Somewhat comfortable \_\_\_ Comfortable

16. Since this class began, how have you felt the presence of God physically? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Physical sensation (i.e. trembling, shaking, electricity)
- ☐ Internal temperature change (i.e. Your body grew warmer or colder)
- ☐ External temperature change (i.e. The room or someone's hand grew warmer or colder)
- ☐ Audibly (i.e. Voice of God, angels singing)
- ☐ Fragrant presence
- ☐ Seen a vision
- ☐ Tears of sorrow or conviction
- ☐ Tears of joy or awe
- ☐ Unexpected laughter (i.e. "Holy Laughter")
- ☐ Overwhelming sense of peace
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Other, please specify:

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17. As a result of this class, briefly explain the impact of learning how to hear God's voice has had on your relationship with Christ?

☐ Remained the same   ☐ Increased a little   ☐ Increased   ☐ Significantly Increased

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. As a result of this class has your spiritual vitality has (check one)

☐ Remained the same   ☐ Increased a little   ☐ Increased   ☐ Significantly Increased

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. As a result of this class, how do you see your future engagement with spiritual disciples (seeking to hear God's voice) to be impacted?

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. As a result of this class, how do you see your level of engagement within the church body to be impacted?

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

21. Would you recommend this class to others \_\_\_\_\_YES or \_\_\_\_\_ NO

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22. Thank you for completing the survey! I appreciate your honesty and self-reflection.  
Please feel free to leave any further comments below that you feel I should know  
about.

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## **APPENDIX C**

### **HEARING GOD CLASS ADVERTISEMENT**

## Do you want to learn how to better hear God's voice?

Join us for a six-week course on learning how to better hear God's  
voice on Wednesday Nights from 6:30 to 8 pm

**Beginning February 5 – March 18\***

God is speaking. The question is are we listening. This course is designed to teach you practical ways to hear God's voice every day. Each week will be comprised of teaching, group discussion, practical application and in class training to hear God's voice.

God speaks to us every day through a variety of means. Many times, we miss what God is saying because we have not been taught how God speaks and how to hear his voice.

In this class you will:

- Learn and experience various ways God's speaks.
- Learn practical ways to hear God's voice every day.
- Learn what the hindrances are to hearing God's voice.
- How to discern if what you are hearing is from God.
- Learn how to speak words from God's heart that build others up.

For more info, questions, or to register, sign up in back of church or contact me at [pastorloribrown@gmail.com](mailto:pastorloribrown@gmail.com) or 302-563-9663.

This class is part of Pastor Lori's doctoral project at United Theological Seminary. This project is designed to help teach people how to better hear God's voice thereby resulting in increased spiritual vitality. As part of this study there will be brief surveys and a post interview that will be used to collect data.

\*April 1 & 8 are reserved for possible snow makeup dates. No class Mar 11 & 25.

\*\* Disclaimer: This is a research project. If you are pregnant, cognitively impaired or are being treated for a psychological condition, please notify me and obtain doctor approval before taking this class.

**APPENDIX D**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM****DMIN Research Project: INCREASE PERSONAL SPIRITUAL VITALITY BY  
LEARNING HOW TO MORE CLEARLY HEAR GOD'S VOICE**

Researcher: Lori Brown

Project Date: February 5, 2020.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lori Brown who is a Doctor of Ministry Student from United Theological Seminary.

We are asking you to take part in this study that will occur over 6 weeks to teach, train, and activate people to more clearly hear God's voice. As a result of this study it is anticipated that learning how to better hear God's voice will increase personal spiritual vitality.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and would consist of attending six one-and-a-half hour sessions, taking a survey before and after, and keeping a simple journal on how God speaks to you during the project (recording only the information you are comfortable sharing). There will be a basic post-interview by me to ascertain additional feedback about your experience of this class. All data collected for research purposes will be confidential, and non-identifying to you.

There are no anticipated risks to your participation. The anticipated direct benefits for participants taking part in this study are:

- A greater hunger and thirst for more of God after the class.
- The ability to hear God's voice more clearly and be moved into action to follow what Jesus is saying and doing.
- Increase spiritual vitality.

This project is completely voluntary and you may drop out at any time. You will be given a copy of this form.

As a participant in this study you certify that you are not pregnant and/or currently being treated for a psychological or mental disorder.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact: Lori Brown @ 302-563-9663 or [pastorloribrown@gmail.com](mailto:pastorloribrown@gmail.com)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX E**

### **HEARING GOD DAILY JOURNAL LOG**

**DAILY JOURNAL LOG**

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Assigned Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**How did you notice, hear, or experience God speaking to you today? (check all that apply)**

_____ Scripture	_____ Audible voice	_____ Inner Voice / Spontaneous thought(s)
_____ Impression	_____ Song	_____ Inner Voice / Spontaneous picture(s)
_____ Other person	_____ Nature	_____ Physical sensation _____
_____ Dream	_____ Vision	_____ Other (specify) _____

**1. What did you hear or sense God saying?**


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☐ Not sure if it was God    ☐ Might have been God    ☐ Pretty sure it was God    ☐ Very Certain

How did you respond and/or obey what God said? \_\_\_\_\_

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**JOURNAL PROMPTS:****2. God, what do you want to say to me today?**


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How did you respond and/or obey what God said? \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ Not sure if it was God    ☐ Might have been God    ☐ Pretty sure it was God    ☐ Very Certain

**3. God, what do you have to say about (something on your heart) \_\_\_\_\_?**


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How did you respond and/or obey what God said? \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ Not sure if it was God    ☐ Might have been God    ☐ Pretty sure it was God    ☐ Very Certain

Journal prompt questions used and inspired by Mark Virkler's teaching in his book and seminars *4 Keys to Learning How to Hear God's Voice*.

**APPENDIX F**  
**WEEKLY CLASS OUTLINES**

## Hearing God's Voice – Week 1

### The Basics – Part 1

1. Welcome and introduction (15 min)
  - a. Review consent form (sign and copy)
  - b. Preliminary survey
2. Prayer and Icebreaker (10)
  - a. Opening Prayer
  - b. Can you think of a time when God prompted you to do something? What happened? Why did you think it was from God? Share with the person next to you.
3. Introduction to Hearing God's Voice
  - a. God has been speaking to His people since the beginning of time as recorded all throughout the Bible (Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – Book of Revelation). God continues to speak to His people today. Jesus even said himself, "My sheep hear my voice" – John 10:2-5 (read)
    1. Read John 10:1-6.
    2. What can we glean from these verses?
    3. Who is the stranger?
    4. What voices do we hear that are regularly trying to speak to us? Four main voices: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. God speaks to us in many ways:
    - i. Scripture
    - ii. Inner Voice (spontaneous thoughts and pictures)
    - iii. Impressions and/or discernment
    - iv. Dreams
    - v. Visions
    - vi. Audible Voice
    - vii. Nature (Psalm 19)
    - viii. Songs (Psalm 42:8)
    - ix. Physically (sensations like tingling, etc.)
    - x. Other People
    - xi. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Book, *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* by Mark Virkler.  
 "Very simply stated, the four keys to hearing God's voice are:
    1. Stillness: Quiet yourself so you can hear God's voice.
    2. Vision: Look for vision as you pray.

3. Spontaneity: Recognize God's voice as spontaneous thoughts that light upon your mind.
4. Journaling: Write down the flow of thoughts and pictures that light upon your mind."

"As exemplified in Habakkuk 2:1-3, there are four keys to hearing God's voice:

1. I will stand on my guard post (be still).
  2. I will keep watch to see (fix your eyes on Jesus).
  3. He will speak to me (tune to spontaneity).
  4. Then the Lord answered me and said, "Record the vision." (Write the flow of thoughts and pictures that light upon your heart and mind.)"
- d. How do we know if it is really from God? (see handout)
  - e. What prevents us from hearing God?
  - f. "The Noticing Hypothesis" and the importance of noticing in learning a second language.
4. Practical Application:
    - a. Hearing God Exercise 1: Journal practice
      - i. Be still, fix your eyes on Jesus, tune to spontaneity, write the flow of thoughts and pictures that flow into your heart and mind. Don't stop the flow by thinking about what you are writing.
    - b. Hearing God Exercise 2: Silent prayer partners (A and B)
  5. Homework
    - a. Complete Hearing God Journals (5 per week)
    - b. Read Psalm 23 slowly taking in each word, write it out by hand, meditate on it, write in your own words (you can do this over the course of a couple of days if you like). How did God speak to you during this process?
  6. Closing prayer...

## **Hearing God's Voice – Week 2**

### **The Basics – Part 2**

1. Welcome, Prayer, Ice Breaker, and Group Sharing (20 min)
  - a. Welcome and Prayer  
Share about how God spoke to you during the Psalm 23 exercise.  
OR  
Share a time this week when you believe God may have spoken to you and how you responded to what God said (with your sharing partners).
  - b. Group sharing (testimony or how did you notice God speaking this past week).

2. Brief review from last week's handout (10 min)

Going Deeper: Hearing, Discerning, and Responding to God's voice (40 min)

- a. John Wesley on using and activating our spiritual senses.
  - i. Hearing
  - ii. Seeing
  - iii. Feeling
  - iv. Tasting
  - v. Touch
- b. Why is how we respond to what God said important?
- c. Spontaneous thoughts and pictures.
  - i. Thoughts
  - ii. Pictures (vision and seeing): Pray "Open our eyes, Lord, so that we can see."  
Exercise to help activate vision: Pick a room in your house. Close your eyes and visualize in your mind what the room looks like.
- d. Discerning God's Voice
  - i. Anything we hear God say will be aligned with God's character, nature, and word.
    1. The difference between
      - a. conviction and condemnation (share story of conference speaker)
      - b. love and fear (getting confirmation from others – last week's participant journaling story)
      - c. peace and anxiety
    - ii. How do we know it is God speaking?
    - iii. How do we know it is not God speaking?
    - iv. Getting confirmation from others.
  - e. What happens when God is silent?
    - i. How long do we wait to hear God's voice?
      1. Sometimes we have to linger longer than other times.
        - a. Share Aldersgate Conference hearing testimony ("five words" testimony) and Moses waiting before the Lord.
    - ii. Does God speak in silence?
      1. "Resting" in God's presence in the silence.
      2. "Trusting" God in the silence.
      3. "Receiving" God's blessings in the silence.
      4. "Hearing" in the silence.
  - f. Turning up the volume – the role of spiritual disciplines in hearing God.  
Spiritual disciplines like reading Scripture, worship, fasting, silence, etc. make us more spiritually sensitive to hearing God.

1. Acts 13:1-3 – example of worship, fasting, and responding to what God said.
2. St. Patrick – example of prayer and fasting.
3. Practical Exercises (10 min)
  - a. Hearing God Exercise 2: Ask God for a picture (or word) that will encourage and strengthen your partner (A and B).
4. Homework for the week (5 min).
  - a. Complete Hearing God Journals (5 per week)
  - b. Watch/listen and journal to the YouTube video (30 minutes) “A guided meditation with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee.” As you listen you will be encouraged to picture yourself with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. After about 5 minutes you will be prompted to journal. Before starting, pick a simple question you would like to ask Jesus. Some suggestions are below:
    1. What do you want to say to me today?
    2. How do you see me?
    3. Do you love me?
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3T510W3yhU> (I’ll email it to you).
  - c. OPTIONAL: Fast for half a day till sometime between noon and 3 pm (drinking only water, coffee, or tea) OR spend 4 hours in silence (no radio, TV, electronics, phone, talking, etc.). Let your family know you will be unavailable during this time. Journal about how you noticed God with or not with you and/or what God said or did not say. What came up for you during this time? How is God trying to encourage, comfort, or strengthen you?
5. Closing Prayer

### **Hearing God’s Voice – Week 3** **The Prophetic Voice**

1. Welcome, Prayer, Ice Breaker, and Group Sharing (20 min)
  - a. Welcome and Prayer
  - b. Share a time this week when you believe God may have spoken to you this week and how you responded to what God said? (Sharing partners)
  - c. Group sharing and testimony:
    - i. How did you notice God speaking to you this past week?
    - ii. How did the “Sea of Galilee” guided meditation go?
    - iii. How did you notice God while fasting or being silent for 4 hours?
2. Review / Going Deeper / Questions (5 min)
  - a. God speaks to us through the written word (*when we read it*). If we are not currently reading the Bible regularly, start. Read one chapter a day (3 to 5

days a week) from the book of Acts or the book of Psalms and notice the various ways God speaks to the people. The Bible is not the only way God speaks.

- b. God speaks to us every day in a variety of other ways as well (very common through thoughts and spontaneous pictures, impressions, songs, dreams, visions, nature, etc.).
  - c. Two-way journaling. We journal what's on our heart, ask God questions, and record the flow of thoughts and pictures God lights upon our mind. Journaling is a great way to practice learning to hear God's voice.
  - d. We test what we heard. Is it from God (does it encourage, convict, strengthen, build faith, is it aligned with the fruit of the Spirit and God's word, etc.), the evil one (does it condemn, produce fear, doubt, isolates, etc. It is not aligned with the fruit of the Spirit or God's word or our own thoughts? Run it by another person. Does this sound like it is from the heart of God? If it's a big thing we ask God for outside confirmation.
3. The prophetic voice (40 min)
- a. Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 14:1-3
    - i. He instructs the believers to "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially, prophecy. (take a couple of minutes and discuss at your tables)
      1. What do you think it means to "follow the way of love *and* eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit (or Spiritual things from God)"?
      2. Why is this important as believers?
      3. What are ways we could practically eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit in our own lives? How can we live this out?
      4. Why do you think Paul says to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy?
        - a. Shawn Bolz, in his book, *Translating God*, says "the prophetic is one of the greatest tools of love we have."
        - b. Paul writes, "The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort." This is the proper use of the gift. It is for the *building up* of individuals and groups of people (i.e. the church, families, neighborhoods, workplaces, etc.).
        - c. If it does not strengthen, encourage, or comfort – don't say it.
          - i. Proverbs 18:21 says, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."



- ii. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. – we are to speak life, words that build others up.
  - iii. God wants us to speak life and thereby build others up. This does not mean we do not have hard conversations with people at times. We must use wisdom and listen to the Spirit.
- ii. How do we learn to hear prophetic words?
  - 1. We practice listening for them?
    - a. The Daily Journal Log has been updated to practice hearing prophetic words for people or groups of people that encourage, strengthen, or comfort.
    - b. Tell them if you feel comfortable. Don't say to them "God told me..." Instead say something like, "I was thinking about you and wanted to encourage you by saying \_\_\_\_\_. Or You were on my heart earlier and I felt like you \_\_\_\_\_"
    - c. When we are in public (waitress, someone at the grocery store), at work, or other places, if God puts someone on our heart, etc., ask what God wants us to say to them. Find a way to insert what you thought you heard naturally into the conversation or write them a note.
- 4. Going Deeper: Hearing God is more than hearing. It is also about responding to what God said (5 min)
  - a. We are called to not only hear or listen to what Jesus says to us, we are to respond to what we heard. "Jesus only did and said what he heard the Father saying and doing."
    - i. In John 10:2-6 and John 10:27 Jesus said:
  - 6. 10:2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him [Jesus is the Shepherd], and the sheep **listen** to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they **know his voice** [they have learned how to recognize Jesus' voice]. 5 But they *will never follow a stranger*; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." [God wants us to learn his voice so clearly that we can easily discern his voice above all the others].
  - ii. The Greek word for listen is ἀκούω. It means "to believe something and to respond to it on the basis of having heard—to accept, to listen to, to listen and respond, to pay attention and respond, to heed." Even

though “listen” only appears one time in these verses it is at the center of the meaning of the parable. Jesus’ sheep hear and know his voice. They respond to what he says. Hearing is more than physically hearing what is spoken. Hearing in this sense accepts, listens, responds, and heeds (follows).

- iii. We respond to God by both *SAYING* what we hear God saying *and DOING* what we see (through pictures, impressions, etc.) God doing. If we do not say and do not do what God is speaking and showing us, can we really say we heard?

5. Practical Exercises (15 min)

- a. Journal prompt listening for prophetic words (handout).
- b. Hearing God Prophetic Words Exercise 2:
  - i. Lord, what do you want to say to my partner? Ask for a picture or word that will encourage and strengthen your partner (A and B). Go with the first thing that pops in your mind.

6. Homework for the week (5 min).

- a. Complete the “Week 3” Hearing God Journals (5 per week)
- b. Practice listening and sharing words God puts on your heart that strengthen, encourage, and give comfort to others. If you are not sure, its ok to say you’re not sure if it is from God that is ok. The great thing about prophetic words like these is that even if it was not from God what we spoke to them was encouraging, strengthening, or brought comfort to them.

7. Closing Prayer

### **Hearing God’s Voice – Week 4** **Words of Knowledge**

1. Welcome, Prayer, Ice Breaker, and Group Sharing (20 min)

- a. Welcome and Prayer
- b. Share a time this week when you believe God may have spoken to you this week and how you responded to what God said? (Sharing partners)
- c. Group sharing and testimony:
  - i. How did you notice God speaking to you this past week?
  - ii. Prophetic words that strengthen, encourage, comfort others?

2. Review / Going Deeper / Questions (5 to 10 min)

- a. The atmosphere of worship connects us to God’s presence and heart thereby opening up the communication lines with God and can make it easier to hear what God is saying.

- i. 2 Kings 3:14 Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not pay any attention to you. 15 But now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came on Elisha 16 and he said, “This is what the Lord says:....”
  - b. 2 Corinthians 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. The words “*eagerly desire*” means to be zealous [to be marked by an active interest, passion, and enthusiasm for] the gifts of the Spirit. We have lived our whole lives and are really good at thinking in the natural, using human wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of the world around us. We are so good at it we don’t have to think about it.
    - 7. Paul is encouraging us to be zealous, to have an active interest, passion, and enthusiasm for the gifts of the Spirit. We have to practice over and over again seeing and tapping into heaven’s resources (not the world’s). This is one way we learn to walk by the Spirit. It is like God is saying you know how to walk in the natural, it is time to learn how to walk in the things of the Spirit living in you. If we do not take an active interest and passion for the things of the Spirit by pursuing and practicing, we will remain spiritual infants.
    - 8. Paul says in Galatians 5:15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh (and I add or the desires of the evil one). 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. *Practicing walking by the Spirit.*
  - c. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.
- 3. Words of Knowledge (40 min)
  - a. Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 12:7-8
    - i. He says, “7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another ***a message of knowledge*** by means of the same Spirit...” (take a couple of minutes as discuss at your tables)
      - 1. When we become believers, who have a personal relationship with Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit. What is one of the purposes the Spirit is given according to the Scripture above? How have you experienced that?
      - 2. Who is the manifestation of the Spirit for?

3. What do you think a word of knowledge from the Spirit is?  
Can you think of an example from Scripture?
4. Have you ever had a word of knowledge from the Spirit,  
something you did not learn on your own but that was revealed  
to you by God? If yes, what is an example from your life?

b. Words of knowledge:

- i. In 1 Corinthians 12:8, the word “knowledge” in this sense means knowledge given by the Spirit that is true and is not something we have learned or were taught by other means. It is knowledge (*a fact that is present or past tense*) that is from God about others or organizations that could not have been known by the receiver. It came from the Spirit.
- ii. Examples: Last week I shared about the man who spoke a word of knowledge when he said my husband has been thinking about retirement recently. That was true and he could not have known it any other means. The word of knowledge confirmed for me that he was hearing from God. Other examples: Job at Bank One, Devon (pregnancy).

1. Many times, words of knowledge are used in healing ministry. Someone gets a word of knowledge about an illness someone has (God typically heals what God reveals). These types of words of knowledge are received through various senses:
  - a. Feel it – you might have a sharp pain, throbbing sensation, etc. that is not common to you.
  - b. See it – via a mental picture, body part, limp, fence, accident, etc.
  - c. Read it – you see the word over someone’s head or in your mind.
  - d. Think it – in your thoughts, an impression, etc.
  - e. Say it – it just comes out in your speaking
  - f. Dream it – have a dream about a health problem
2. Words of knowledge can come as a springboard getting the person’s attention that God loves them and prepares them to hear a prophetic word about their life. They could come in dates, names, other things.
3. Words of knowledge are also used to build, strengthen, comfort and heal (see note in iii below).
4. Never used to call out sin or expose someone (that’s not God).
5. Everyone can receive words of knowledge.

- iii. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit. We do not use words of knowledge to call out sin. The same rule applies (especially while we are learning), if it does not strengthen, encourage, comfort, build-up, healing – don't say it. If you get a word that you believe comes from God and it does not build others up, consult a ministry leader or pastor. There are ways to speak into a situation without calling someone out. For instance, I sense there is something that really has a hold of you, etc.
  - c. How do we learn to hear words of knowledge?
    - i. We practice listening for them?
      - 1. The Daily Journal Log has been updated to practice hearing words of knowledge.
      - 2. When we go out in public (waitress, someone at the grocery store), at work, church, or other places, ask God for words of knowledge for the people you meet. Find a way to insert what you thought you heard naturally into the conversation.
- 4. Practical Exercises (15 min)
  - a. Journal prompt listening for words of knowledge (handout).
  - b. Group sharing
- 5. Homework for the week (5 min).
  - a. Complete the "Week 4" Hearing God Journals (5 per week)
  - b. Spend some intentional time in worship by yourself or together; 10 min first day, 15 min second day, 20 minutes third day. As you worship pay attention to what is being put on your heart. After worship, spend some time journaling what you heard and sensed in the Spirit.
  - c. Practice listening for words of knowledge and prophetic words God puts on your heart that strengthen, encourage, and give comfort to others. If you are not sure, its ok to say you are not sure. For example, I thought or sensed \_\_\_\_\_, does this mean anything to you?
- 6. Closing Prayer

### **Hearing God's Voice – Week 5** **Words of Counsel and Might**

- 1. Welcome, Prayer, Ice Breaker, and Group Sharing (20 min)
  - a. Welcome and Prayer
  - b. Share a time this week when you believe God may have spoken to you and how you responded to what God said? (Sharing partners)
  - c. Group sharing and testimony:

- i. How did you notice God speaking to you this past week?
- ii. Prophetic words that strengthen, encourage, comfort others or words of knowledge?
- iii. How did the homework go (what did you notice from worship 10, 15, 20 min exercise)

2. Review / Going Deeper / Questions (5 to 10 min)

- a. Words of Knowledge: In 1 Corinthians 12:8 the word “knowledge” in this sense means knowledge given by the Spirit that is true and is not something we have learned or were taught by other means. It is knowledge from God (a fact that is present or past tense) about others or organizations, health conditions, etc. that could not have been known by the receiver. It came from the Spirit. This knowledge is used to encourage both the hearer and receiver. Everyone can hear, see, feel, sense words of knowledge.

9. For the hearer it gives more confidence they are hearing from God correctly. Have fun with learning words of knowledge. As you practice, pray for fun facts about someone (stranger or someone you know). Ex. Earl heard pickles for me. I love pickles. It’s ok to be wrong too.

10. For the receiver, practicing will help fine-tune our ear toward God for us to be used as his agent in our life. For instance, if God gives you a word of knowledge when you are out and about you can easily test it. I heard “pickles (or whatever it was) three times in my head, does that mean anything to you?” Practice will also prepare you to minister with people in the future. When you walk past someone for example and God highlights their ears to you, you can ask them if they have any issues with their hearing. They might say no or tell you they have a loss of hearing in one or both ears. If yes, God most likely wants you to pray for their hearing to be restored. Many times, God heals what God reveals. *These gifts are used for the common good* (that includes strangers you meet, acquaintances, good friends, and family, and the body of Christ). God wants us to grow in the things of the Spirit for the building up of people (believers and non-believers).

3. Words of Counsel and Might (40 min) Isaiah 9:6-7 and Isaiah 11:1-7

- a. Read Isaiah 11:1-7 out loud from Week 5 Scripture (last page)

- i. Isaiah: 11:1-5 New International Version (NIV)

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he

will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. (take a couple of minutes to discuss at your tables)

1. Notice how in verse 2 it says, “The Spirit of wisdom and understanding.” “the Spirit of counsel and might,” and “the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.” They are like pairs that go together. Why do you think that is or might be?
  2. What do you think is meant by “He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears” means?
  3. What will he instead judge with (v4)?
  4. In the end, what does Isaiah see of the future with his spiritual eyes (v6-7)?
- b. Hearing Words of Counsel and Might: Read Isaiah 9:6-7 out loud.
- i. Mark Virkler, in his class called “Counseled by God,” says that we can receive free ongoing counsel from God who is the wonderful counselor. He believes the key to receiving this counsel is found in Matthew 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.*
- c. He teaches the following<sup>1</sup>
- i. What is a pure heart?
    1. What is a pure heart? A heart that is full of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13)
    2. When we see God in action, faith, hope, and love are established in our hearts.
  - ii. What is an impure heart?
    1. Any opposite of faith, hope, and love.
    2. The opposite of faith would be fear and unbelief.
    3. The opposite of hope would be hopelessness, despair, and loneliness.
    4. The opposite of love would be anger, hatred, and rage.
    5. When we see Satan in action, we experience an impure heart.
  - iii. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see [with spiritual eyes] God.
    1. It’s probably the seeing God that actually makes and keeps our heart pure.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark and Patti Virkler, *Learn Notebook Counseled by God: Emotional Wholeness Through Hearing God’s Voice* (Buffalo, NY: Communion With God Ministries, 2011), 3. Adobe Digital Editions PDF.

2. When our heart is pure, we can easily see Him as we walk the road of life.
- iv. Example from Elisha's servant who did not initially see, but later did. Read 2 Kings 6:8-12 (words of knowledge) and 2 Kings 6:13-17
  1. At first, he only sees the enemy chariots. He does not see God, and his heart is not pure; it is full of fear.
  2. Elisha prayed, "Lord open his eyes so he can see what's out there," and he sees the angelic host in fiery chariots, protecting them.
  3. By seeing God in action, his fear is removed and his heart is purified with faith and hope.
- v. When faith, hope, and love are missing.
  1. We renounce "fear, unbelief, doubt, discouragement, anger, etc." We say something like: "Lord I know \_\_\_\_ is not of you. I renounce \_\_\_\_\_ and repent from my sin by turning away from it and turning toward you. In Jesus name.
  2. We get in God's presence. Take a couple of deep breaths (inhale God's Spirit and exhale the junk). We can then begin to be counseled by God.
- d. In the above teaching from Mark Virkler, *Counseled by God* series, we can see the importance of having a pure heart. A pure heart puts us in a great position to see, hear, and receive counsel from God. A pure heart opens us up to receive God's counsel for the situations in our lives, families, workplaces, etc.
  - i. This is where everything we have been learning to date comes together in a greater measure.
    1. God speaks to us through a variety of means.
      - a. Scripture, spontaneous thoughts and pictures, visions/dreams, impressions, nature, physical sensation, songs, other people, audible voice, etc.
      - b. Sometimes it is a booming voice and many other times it comes as a whisper.
    2. We begin to hear God through a variety of channels. It is similar to turning that old TV with the bunny ears. We move them to the perfect position. We use a hanger and tinfoil to amplify it (not sure if you did that). We adjust until we get everything at the right position. We tune to the clearest frequency where the picture and sound comes through clearly. How many remember that?
    3. Using tools like reading Scripture, time alone with God, journaling what we hear God saying, fasting, worship, being silent, etc. all help to clear the obstacles to our hearing God's voice. Psalm 46:10 Be still and know that I am God.



4. This past week God very clearly spoke to me and said I need to go deeper into the disciplines of prayer and fasting during this next season (church, ministry, and life). It will help increase spiritual seeing and hearing for what is next. God led me there through a variety of means (Scripture, video, other people, impression, physical sensation (like burning in my heart), conviction, etc.
  5. We discern God's voice greater the more channels we clear and listen to from the above list.
  6. The "might" part has to do with God's power to accomplish what he shows us in the Spirit. i.e. Isaiah 11:6 The wolf will live with the lamb, etc. God through his strength and might can bring about God's plan for our circumstance.
4. Practice Exercise: Receiving Counsel from God (10 Min) Handout.
    - a. Think of a situation on your heart where you would like counsel from God.
    - b. Ask God
      1. How do you see this situation?
      2. What do you want me to do?
      3. What's my next step?
    - c. Group sharing
  5. Homework for the week (5 min).
    - a. Complete the "Week 5" Hearing God Journals next two weeks (5 per week)
    - b. How does God want you to tune your spiritual hearing and seeing?
    - c. Practice listening for God's counsel. Evaluate your heart? Is it pure? Are you full of faith, hope, and love? If not, renounce the other things that are there until your heart is pure. Think of a circumstance where you would like to receive counsel. Ask God about the situation and write down what God impresses and speaks to you.
  6. Closing Prayer

### **Hearing God's Voice – Week 6** **Words of Wisdom and Revelation**

1. Welcome, Prayer, Ice Breaker, and Group Sharing (20 min)
  - a. Welcome and Prayer
  - b. Share a time this week when you believe God may have spoken to you this week and how you responded to what God said? (Sharing partners)
  - c. Group sharing and testimony:
    - a. How did you notice God speaking to you this past week?
    - b. Did you receive counsel from God regarding a situation in your life?

c. How did the homework go?

2. Words of Wisdom and Revelation Ephesians 1:17-19 (40 min)

Read Ephesians 1:17-19 – ***I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*** 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

a. Paul prays that the *Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation* will be given to the people. This is a great prayer to pray for ourselves, family, church, neighborhood, community and world.

a. What is wisdom? What is the difference between human wisdom and the wisdom the Spirit offers us? Can you think of a time when you received wisdom from God? Share with the group.

b. What is Revelation?

One of my favorite definitions on what revelation is, comes from theologian and author Donald Bloesh, in his book, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation*. There he writes:

“Revelation is a "meeting" between God and the believer whereby God speaks and we hear. The "spoken word" is a metaphor containing two elements: personal encounter and the impartation of knowledge. The Hebrew word *galah* is used to refer both to God's self-manifestation and the communication of his message. In the New Testament revelation is both unveiling (Greek *apokalypsis*) and manifestation (*phaneroo*, *phane- rosis*). It is also associated with *epiphaneia*, which denotes the appearance of divinity in earthly history. Revelation entails both divine presence and divine meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

c. What jumps out to you in the definition of “revelation” above?

d. Can you think of a time when you received revelation from God? Share with the group.

b. What is the purpose and work of receiving wisdom and revelation from God in our lives according to Paul from the Scripture above?

c. In the above definition of Revelation, Donald Bloesh wrote, revelation is a "meeting" between God and the believer whereby God speaks and we hear. Where the spoken word is a metaphor containing two elements: personal encounter and the impartation of knowledge (the knowledge of God).

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<sup>2</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 476, Kindle

An ancient way to encounter the living word is through a practice called Lectio Divina.

Encounter the Word Exercise: Read Psalm 46 and answer the following questions?

Handout and instructions: Lectio Divina Guides PDF by Bill Gaultiere  
Read Psalm 46 three times. After each reading ask one of the below questions for participants to journal their response and then discuss. After you complete the first question, repeat each step for questions two and three.

Prayer / Journaling / Soul Talk Prompts

- a. What is one word or phrase that Holy Spirit impresses on you? In silence meditate on that.
  - b. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.
  - c. What is God's personal invitation to you from the Scripture? You can write down what the Lord may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or Simply rest quietly in the Spirit's presence.<sup>3</sup>
- d. S.O.A.P: Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer
- Setting aside daily time to in God's word re-patterns the way we think and transforms our minds and lives. Here are four simple steps to get enrolled in the University of the Holy Spirit:
1. Set aside time every day to listen to the Holy Spirit as you engage with God's word.
  2. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to highlight some portion of your Scripture reading for that day. This will be the verse that "jumps off" the page for you.
  3. Read from both the Old and New Testament. Pick a reading plan. If you don't already have one try the Life Journal Reading Plan (it takes you through the Bible in a year and includes readings from both Old and New Testament daily).
  4. In your journal follow the SOAP method (below) and write a few sentences on each of the following:
- S - Scripture: This will be the one verse that the Holy Spirit "highlighted" for you as you read.
- O - Observation: Jot down what you observe about this verse within its biblical context.

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Gaultiere, *Lectio Divina Guides for Personal or Group Meditation*, (Irvine, CA, Soul Shepherding, Inc., 2018), 15 Adobe Digital Editions PDF.

A - Application: Write down any "take-homes" or personal applications.  
Where does this verse touch your life?

P - Prayer: Close your time with a prayer asking God to make this learning come alive in your life.

Journaling is an excellent way to both record and process what God has spoken to us. It's also a useful tool to use at a later time to reflect on and review some of the "gems" that you have received. Without writing down, you may forget those blessings and some very important lessons!

The above information on S.O.A.P. has been adapted and taken from chapter seven of Wayne Cordeiro's book, *The Divine Mentor*.<sup>4</sup>

Handout and instructions

3. Listening exercise:
  - a. What do you want to say to me?
  - b. What do you want to say to us?
4. Post Survey and Closing Prayer.

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *The Divine Mentor: Growing your Faith as You Sit at the Feet of the Savior*, (Bloomington, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 1415. Kindle.

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